



Research lessons from cost of living study

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Testing our Resilience

The impact of the cost of living crisis on volunteering and volunteers

Final report – 27 September 2022



Background to the research

Catalyst

- July 2022 - growing realisation of an emerging crisis
- Aug 2022 – meeting with the British Red Cross
- Lack of evidence on the impact of cost of living on volunteering

Objectives

- Understand how the cost of living crisis will impact on volunteering
- Both formal and informal volunteering
- Identify immediate impacts of crisis versus longer-term cumulative impacts
- Examine linkages between COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis
- Provide initial ideas on ‘Areas for Action’

Methodology

Approach

- Speed was of the essence.
- Exclusive focus on secondary data from Scotland and wider UK.
- Mainly quantitative evidence.
- Literature review - key sources:
 - Scottish Third Sector Tracker¹
 - 'Understanding Scotland'²
 - 'The Road to Recovery'³

Constraints

- Fast moving environment – 'moving goalposts'.
- Key partners provided valuable inputs: BRC, SCVO and SG Third Sector Unit.
- But....lack of time for wider partner engagement.
- And....lack of time for rigorous literature review.

Demand and supply of core services

Demand

- c. **60%** of TSOs experienced increased demand in the previous 3 months for waves 2-4.
- BUT....increased demand is more prevalent for larger TSOs:

Demand – wave 4 (n=429)	Under £100k	Over £100k
Increased	57%	77%
The same	30%	18%
Decreased	11%	4%

Supply

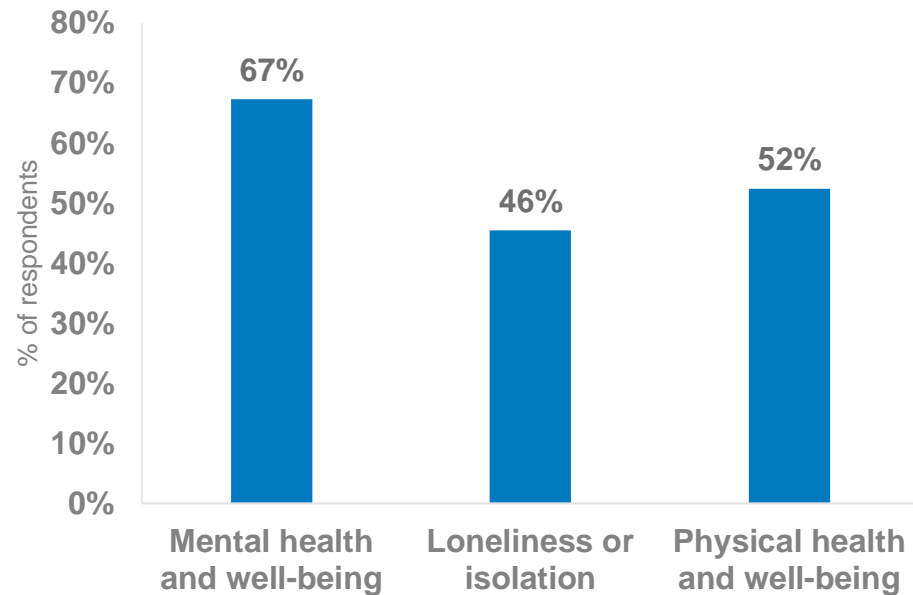
- c. **20%** of TSOs are struggling to meet this increased demand for core services for waves 2-4

Ability to meet demand	Wave 2 (n=438)	Wave 3 (n=457)	Wave 4 (n=429)
Meet most or all demand	83%	78%	80%
Meet some or none of demand	17%	22%	19%

Key drivers of increased demand

Across the last three months, which, if any, of the following emerging needs have you seen become worse among the communities or target groups you serve?

Health and wellbeing needs (wave 4)

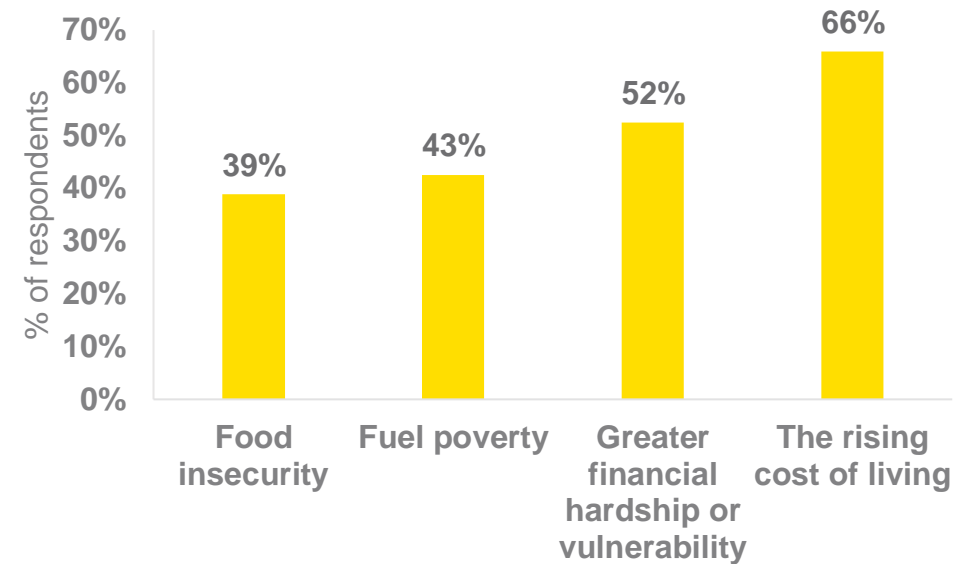


n=341



Bad, but better than during 2021

Financial and economic needs (wave 4)



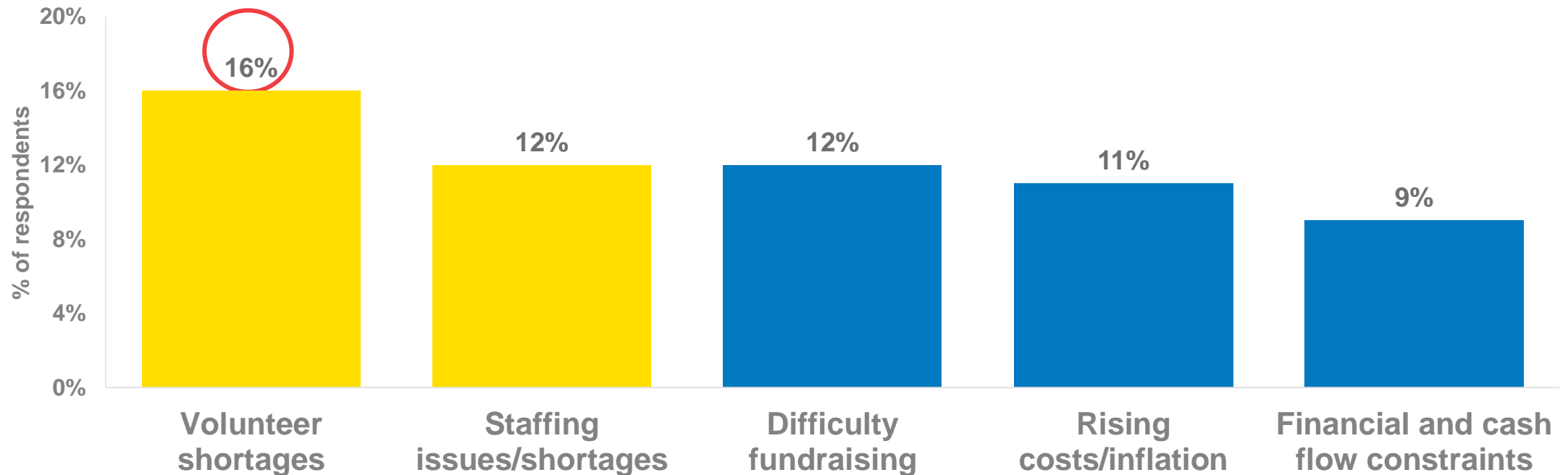
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CoL crisis has extended/exacerbated the financial impacts from COVID-19

Single biggest challenge facing TSOs

4th wave - summer 2022

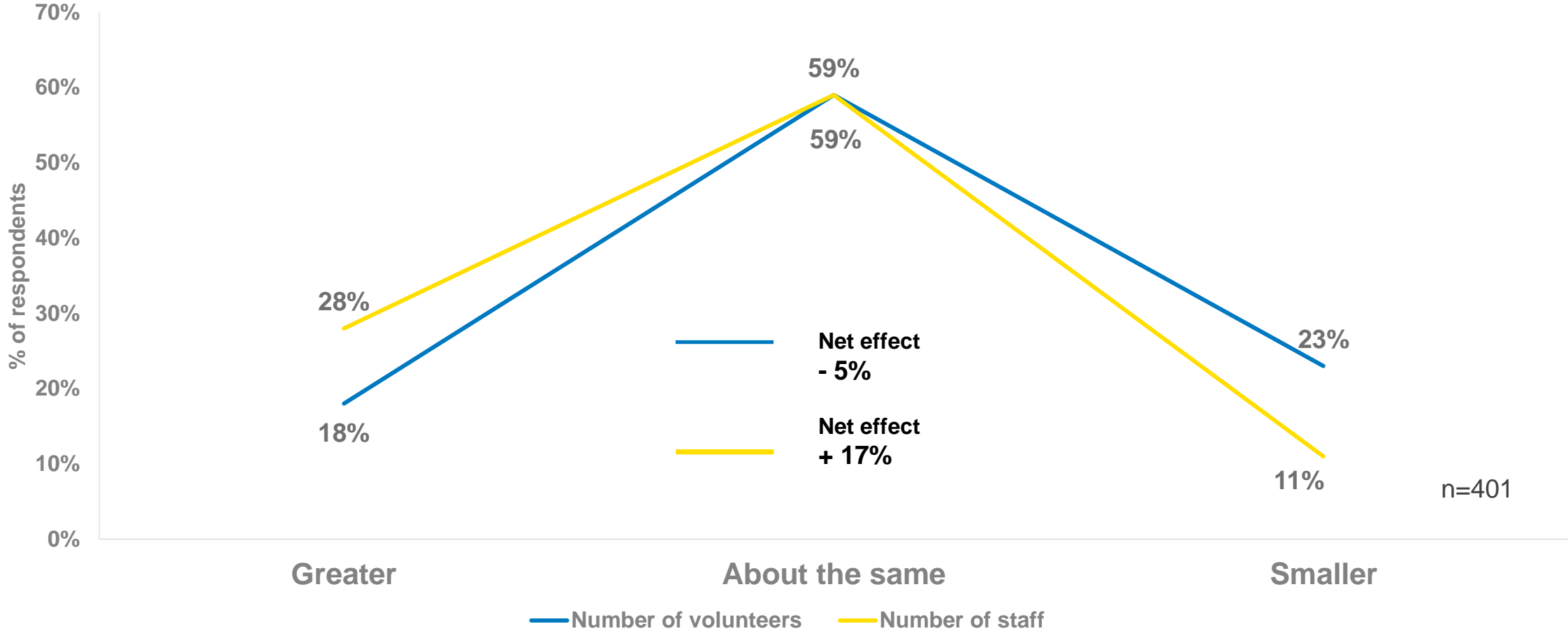


The top five biggest challenges account for 60% of TSOs.

n=423

The remaining 40% is split between 8 other challenges, 'don't know', and 'organisations facing no challenges'.

Impact on TSOs' staff and volunteer numbers – Wave 4



Analytical impact model

Impact on People

- Reduced disposable income
- Homelessness
- Adverse health and wellbeing

Impact on Organisations

- Increasing costs
- Reduced income
- But service demand rising
- Business closures

Impact on Communities

- Community resilience weakened
- Geographies subject to poverty most disadvantaged

Impact on volunteering and volunteers (hypotheses)

- Increasing demand for volunteering services – but volunteer numbers may contract
- Volunteer recruitment is now the major issue facing TSOs
- Potential displacement of employees by volunteers
- Health and wellbeing of volunteers projected to worsen – but less support available
- Places to volunteer formally may reduce opening hours, or even face closure
- Impacts on volunteering and volunteers most severe in SIMD quintiles 1 and 2

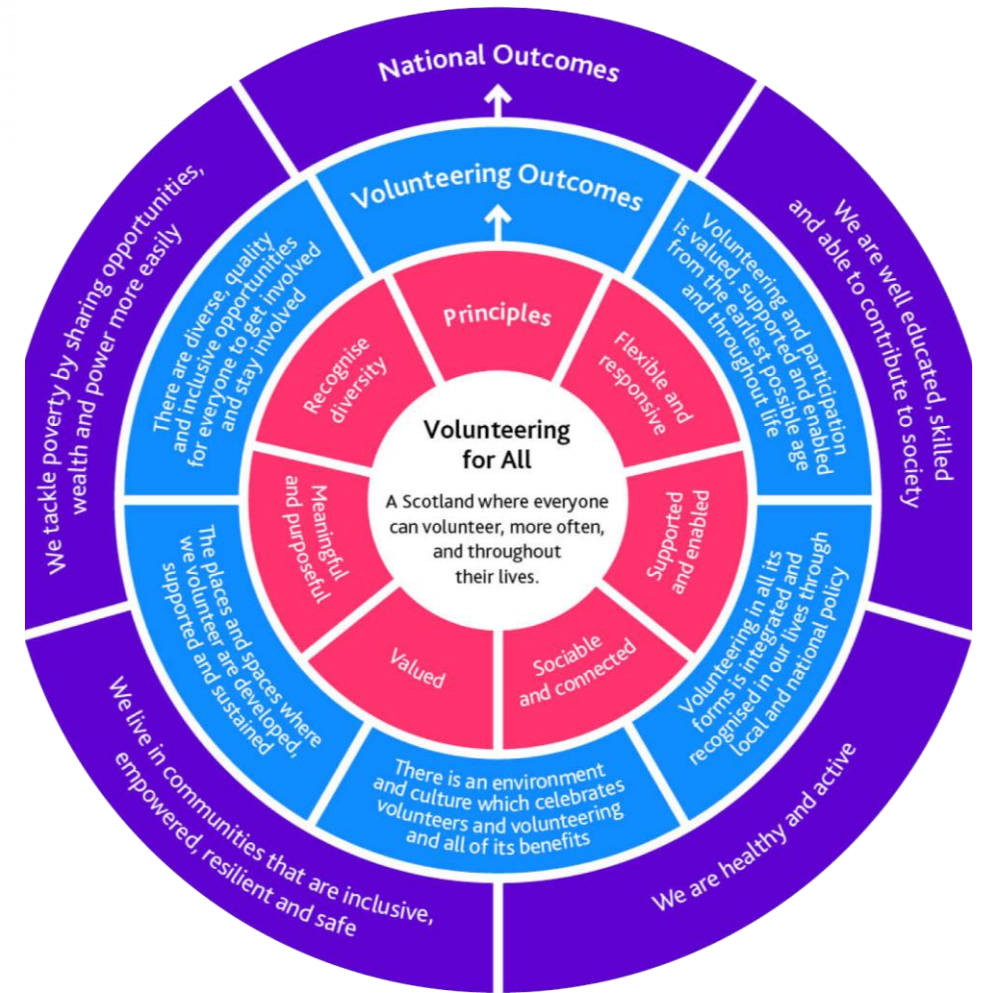
‘Top Ten’ Areas for Action⁴

- 1 Ensuring VIOs’ volunteering is supported financially
- 2 Responding to increased demand for services
- 3 Increasing recruitment and improving retention of formal volunteers
- 4 Investing in volunteer management
- 5 Protecting the health and wellbeing of volunteers
- 6 Focusing volunteering support where it is needed most
- 7 Ensuring volunteers do not replace paid roles
- 8 Facilitating the engagement of informal volunteers
- 9 Influencing Government policy
- 10 Filling the evidence gaps



Volunteering Action Plan⁵

- Launched June 2022 by Volunteer Scotland and the Scottish Government
- ‘Living Plan’ with 10 year life cycle
- Follows on from Volunteering for All Framework
- Focus on inclusion, lifelong engagement, spaces for volunteering and recognition



Lessons learned

Mobilisation

- We could have spotted this research gap earlier.
- Research during a crisis needs a fast response.
- Don't let research perfection delay your work. It's a moving target anyway.
- Partner engagement is critical – we should have devoted more time to this.
- Sole authorship is much faster than co-production!

Delivery

- Be careful of 'scope creep' – the original plan was a discussion paper.
- Be honest about what you don't know – lots of research gaps were identified.
- Longitudinal quantitative data is the 'holy grail' in understanding the dynamic impacts in a crisis.
- Qualitative data and case studies would have strengthened the report.

Finally....this is only the start of our understanding of how volunteering will be impacted by the cost of living crisis.

Relevant links

1. The Scottish Third Sector Tracker - research undertaken by DJS Research and funded by SCVO, the Scottish Government, The National Lottery Community Fund and the William Grant Foundation - [link](#)
2. Understanding Scotland – The Diffley Partnership - [link](#)
3. The Road to Recovery: lessons learned from Scotland’s volunteering response to COVID-19 – Volunteer Scotland, February 2022 - [link](#)
4. Testing our Resilience: the impact of the cost of living crisis on volunteering and volunteers – Volunteer Scotland, August 2022 – [link](#)
5. Scotland’s Volunteering Action Plan: [link](#)

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