Covid 19 Information and Data Hub

Bulletin 5: 23 July 2020

This is the fifth bulletin of the COVID-19 Information and Data Hub which presents the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on people in the immigration system across the UK. It presents data from two sources representing 114 organisations from across the UK.

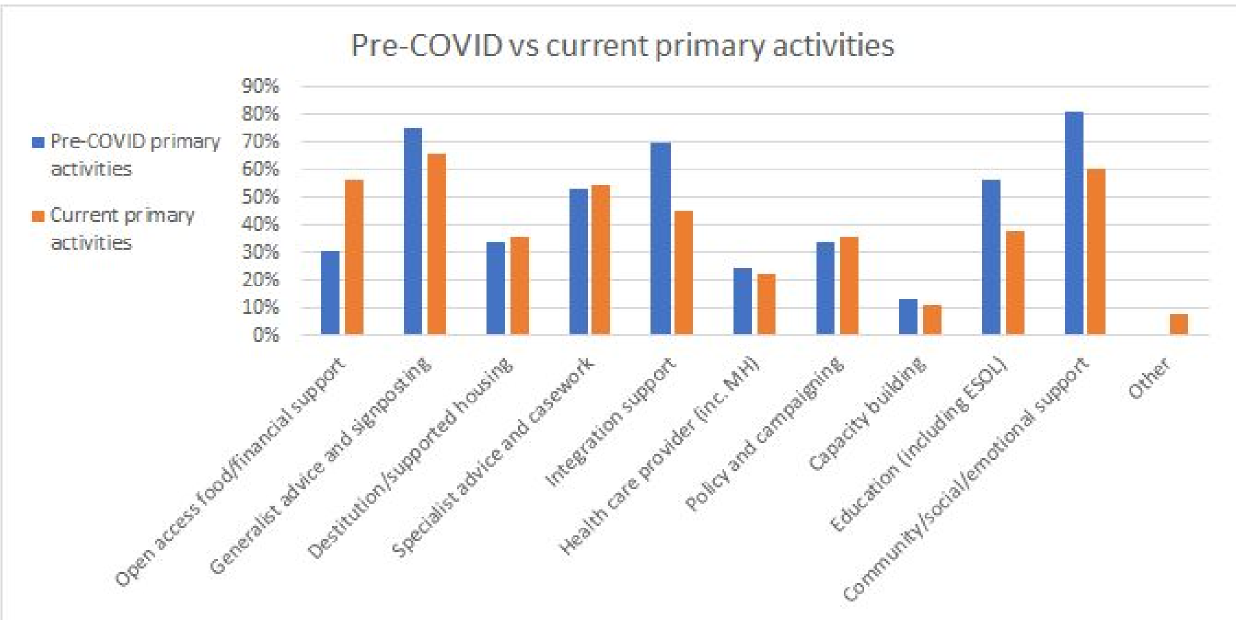
Section 1: Survey of Refugee and Migration Organisations

1. Respondents

- The survey received 53 responses from organisations operating in all regions of the UK except Northern Ireland. The largest group of respondents, 28%, operate in London, followed by 17% in Yorkshire & the Humber, 11% UK-wide and 9% in the North West.
- Turnover: 23% under £150,000; 60% between £150,000 and £1 million; 17% over £1 million.
- 33 respondents had participated in a previous Information and Data Hub survey (62%). 14 respondents (26%) have participated in all five surveys, 11 (21%) in the last 4 surveys, and 30 organisations (57%) have participated in the last 2 surveys (4 and 5).
- The most common client groups (where respondents were able to select multiple main client groups) were: People seeking asylum who are destitute (62%) , Refugees who have received their status in the UK (58%) People who have been refused asylum who are living in the community (58%), People seeking asylum

living in Home Office accommodation – Initial Accommodation or Dispersal (57%), and Migrants who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) (42%)[1].

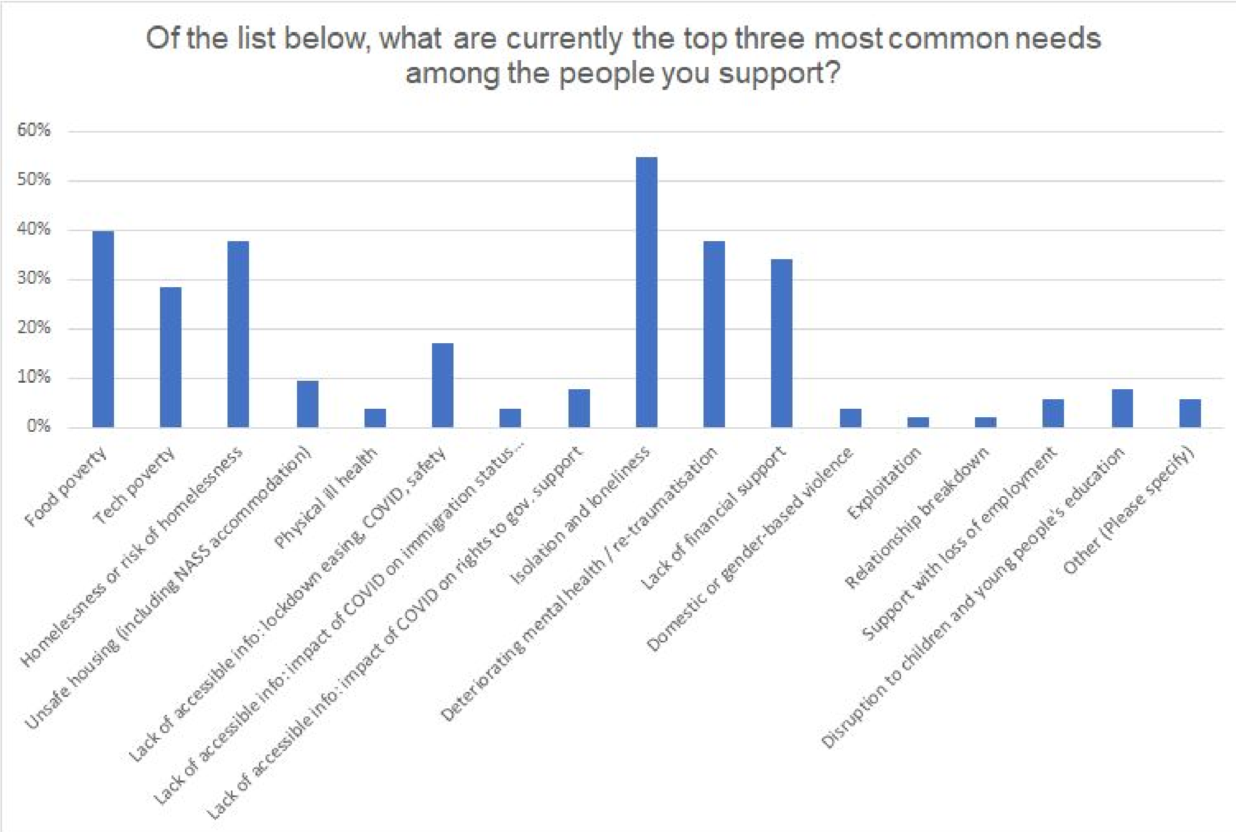
- Lived experience leadership: 36% (19) said their organisation is led by someone with lived experience of UK refugee or migration systems. Of these, four respondents said this leadership role was CEO, three said Chair, seven said trustees or management committee members, five within senior or executive leadership and five within management.



- The survey asked about changes in organisations primary activities compared to pre-Covid. Responses show an increase in open access food and decrease in integration support, education, community activities.

[1] Breakdown of percentage of organisations working with other main client groups: Refugees who have been resettled in the UK (40%), EU nationals (30%), Undocumented migrants (23%), Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (23%), Immigration detention (8%), Children with insecure immigration status (8%).

2. Changes in the Needs of People within the Immigration System

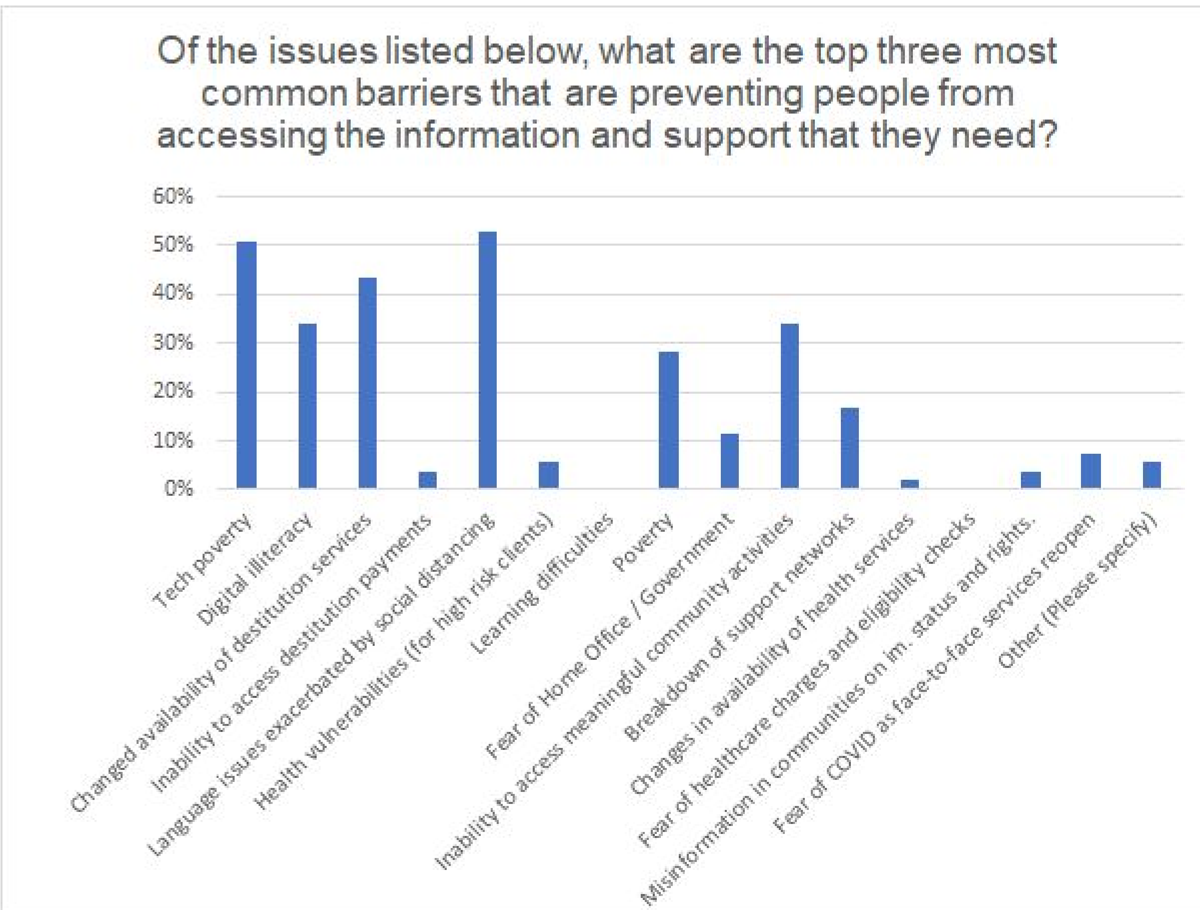


- The most common top client need, reported by 55% organisations (in the top 3 needs of clients), is **isolation and loneliness**. This is followed by **food poverty** (40%), **homelessness/risk of homelessness** (38%), **deteriorating mental health** (38%) and **lack of financial support** (34%).
- Top needs identified across surveys 1-4, covering the lockdown period, were **food poverty**, **isolation and loneliness**, **tech poverty** and **lack of financial support,** with **deteriorating mental health** also high, but more variable. The categories for this question have changed since Survey 4 to reflect changing needs. The results from this survey suggest that although lockdown is easing, needs have not yet changed significantly and that **isolation and loneliness** has surpassed **food poverty** as the key concern.
- Information access remains an important concern: 17% reported (**lack of accessible information (e.g. not translated) about lockdown easing, COVID**

and how to stay safe), and there are emerging concerns about declining English skills and interpreting services, and lack of access to TV and internet.

- **Safety is an increasing concern**. Respondents reported concerns about housing security, access and quality, risks for specific groups (looked after children, new arrivals, family members of service users deceased due to COVID), and rising discriminatory treatment including labour exploitation and hate crime.

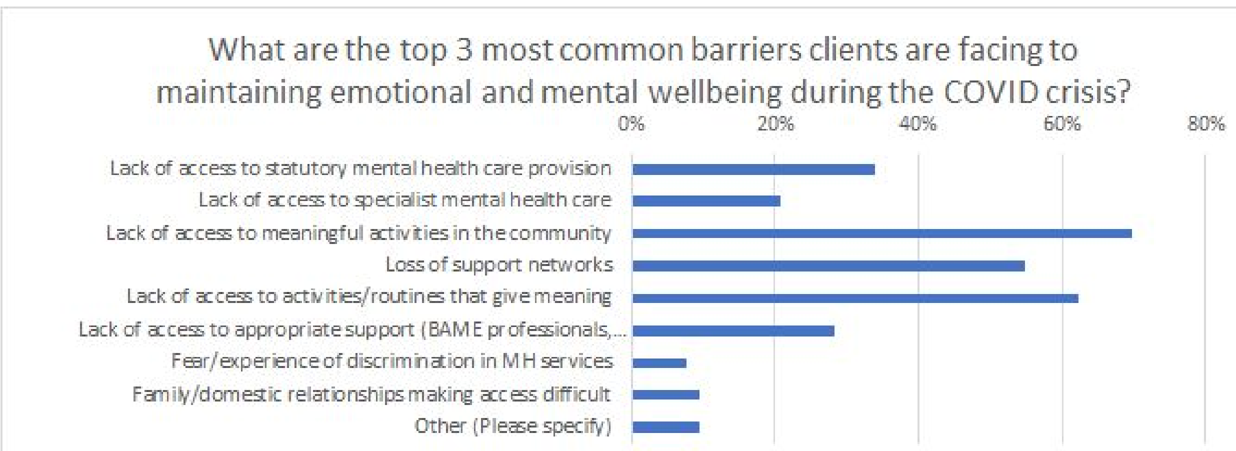
3. Barriers Preventing People From Accessing Services



- The top barriers in this survey are **language issues exacerbated by social distancing** (53%), which was a new category introduced in Survey 5, closely followed by **tech poverty** (51%) which was a consistently high theme across surveys 1-4 and **changes in availability of services**, also a new category (43%).

- **Digital illiteracy,** another new category introduced in Survey 5, was reported by 34% of organisations in top 3 barriers and more commonly reported than **unable to access meaningful activities** which was consistently among the top 3 needs across surveys 1-4.
- **Inability to access destitution payments** is notably lower than previous surveys, at 4% compared to over 20% across Surveys 2-4. However **poverty**, a new and related barrier category for Survey 5, sits at 28%.

4. Client and Staff Wellbeing



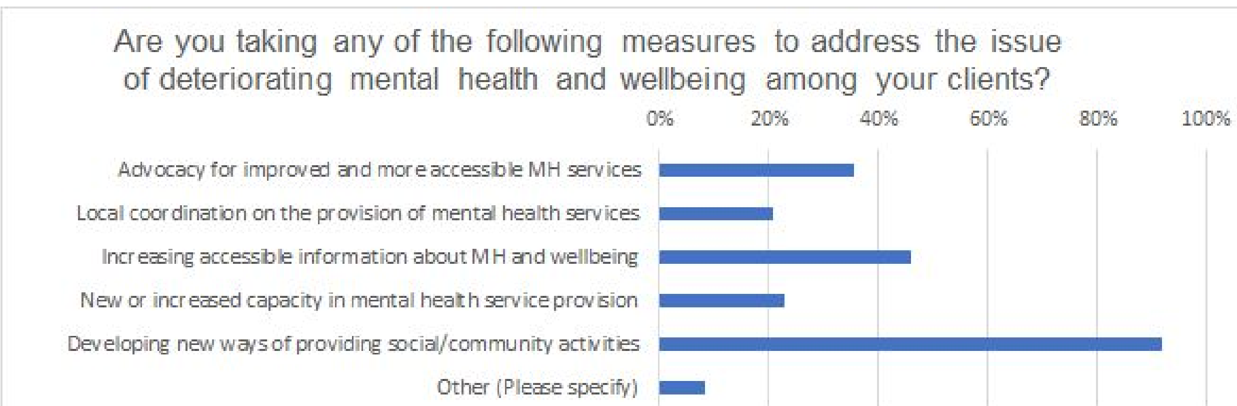
- The top three barriers faced by clients to maintaining emotional and mental wellbeing identified in this survey are **lack of access to meaningful community activities** (70%), **lack of access to routine/activities that give a sense of purpose** (62%), **loss of support networks** (55%).
- In **'Other'**, respondents highlighted the particular challenges faced by women with childcare responsibilities[2], and the pressures on the wellbeing LGBTQI people in the immigration system who cannot be open about their sexualty or

[2] Looking after children is one of several disproportionate gendered impacts that women in the immigration system might face under Covid. For further research on refugee and asylum seeking women particularly, and their experience during the pandemic, please see the **Sisters Not Strangers 'Hear Us' report**.

identity where they are living, placing them at risk when accessing remote services or connecting with other people using the internet at home.

- There are also specific concerns around the **wellbeing of people in immigration detention centres,** who are already subject to isolation, poor healthcare, and the holistically damaging impact of being indefinitely detained.

- The **impact of waiting or uncertainty on clients' wellbeing** was raised by respondents across the survey. While this issue precedes the pandemic, the crisis has exacerbated delays in processes and case decisions, heightened housing insecurity and decisions on move on/ evictions, compounding the widespread uncertainty and anxiety associated with the pandemic.

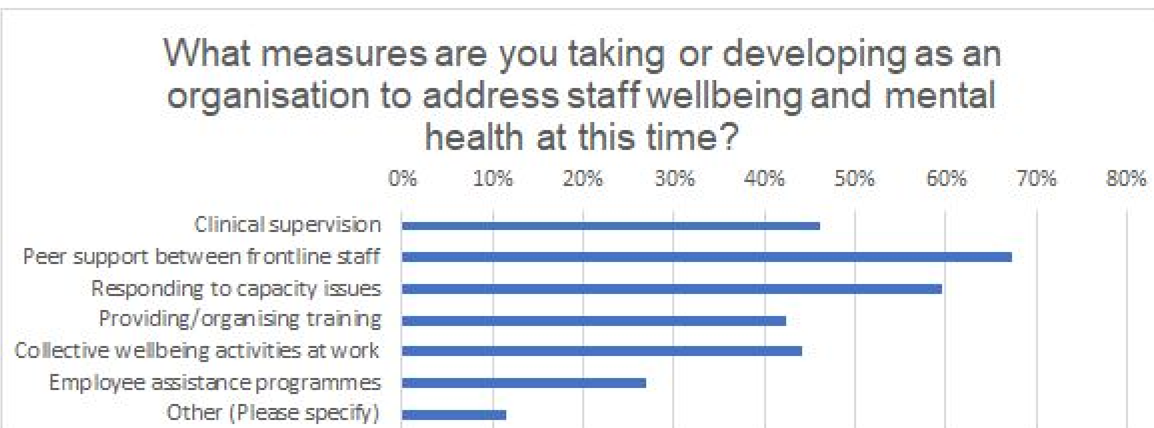


- **Developing new ways of providing social/community activities**, is by far the most common response from organisations to address deteriorating mental health, selected by 92%, where respondents could select multiple responses.

- This finding corresponds with the top barriers to wellbeing reported above as well as an emerging operational need: 'how do we build community and promote wellbeing while socially distancing'.

- 75% of respondents told us that their staff are reporting **stress**, 56% **overwork**, and 56% **safety and health concerns.**

- Isolation in work and the impact of handling difficult client issues alone were cited by 2 respondents in **'other'** issues. Other stressors noted by respondents: a sense of inadequacy despite overwork, in the face of such extreme problems; job insecurity; and COVID-19 induced mission drift.

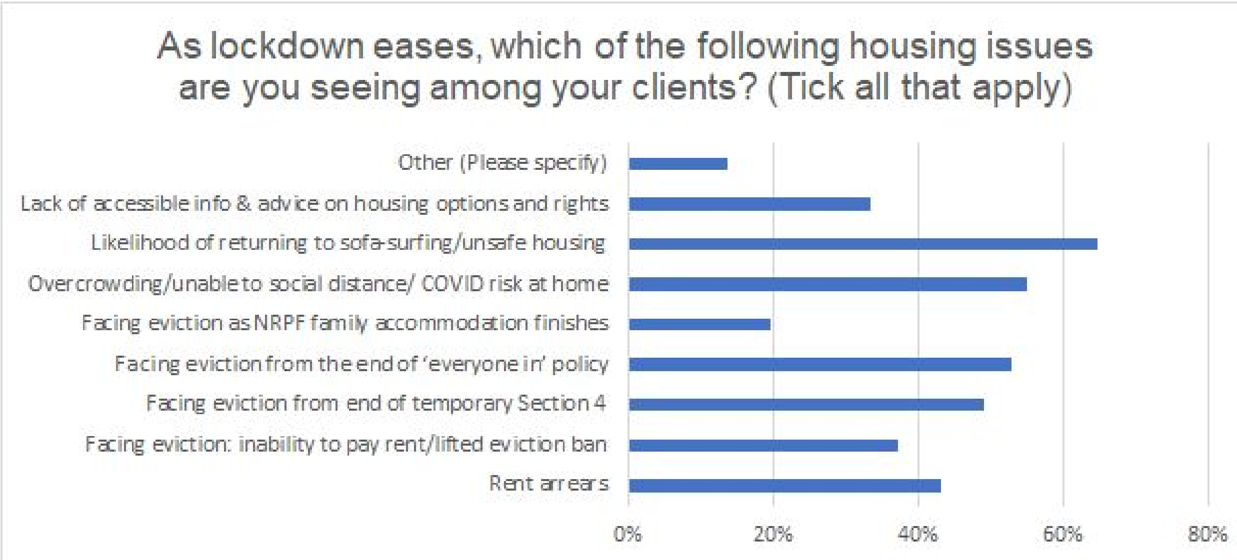


- **Peer support between frontline staff** was the most common measure being taken, at 67%, **followed by responding to capacity issues (reducing caseload, recruiting new staff)** at 60%.

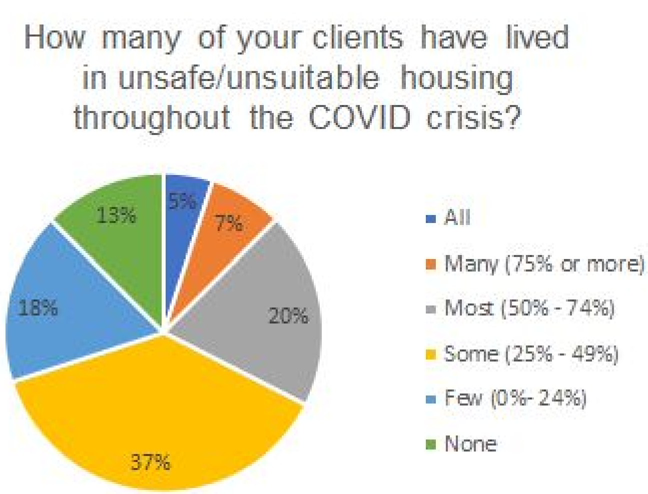
- While **clinical supervision** was the third most common measure, two respondents noted in writing that they did not have enough funding to pay for it.

- **'Other'** measures included introducing increased team contact, scheduling periods of reduced workload, and adapting staffing structures.

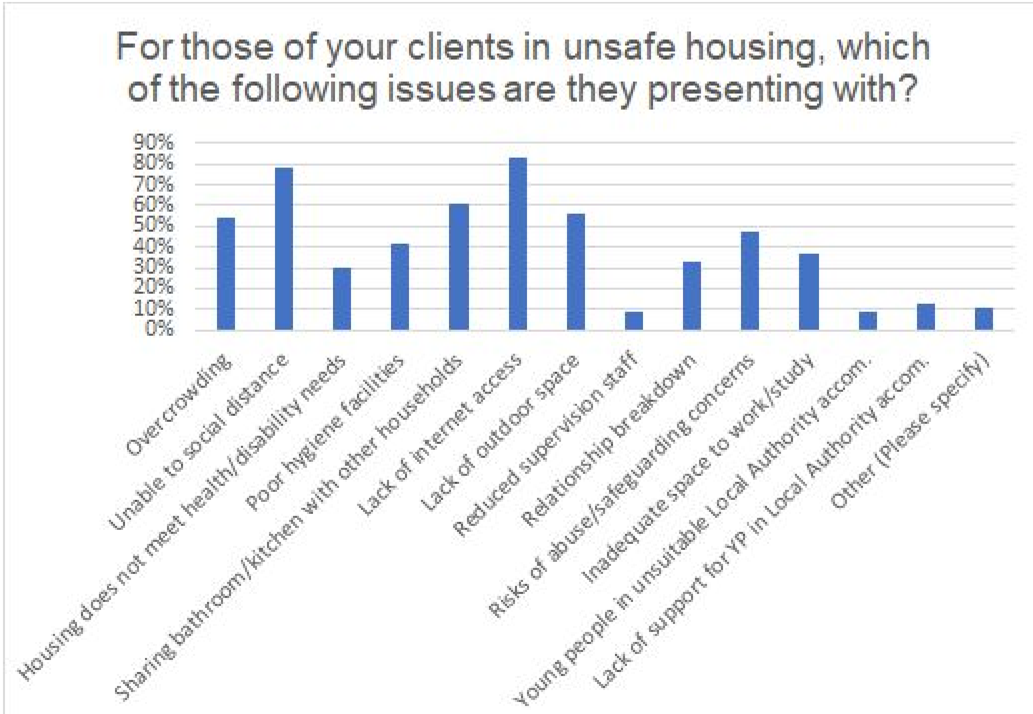
5. Housing



- The top issues reported by organisations, where they could select multiple options, are **likelihood of returning to sofa-surfing/other unsafe housing** (65%) followed by **overcrowding/inability to practice social distancing at home** (55%), and **evictions from Section 4 accommodation** (49%) and resulting from **the end of the 'everyone in' policy** (53%).
- In '**other'** responses to this question, housing related concerns were raised about specific groups: women, LGBTQI migrants, people in detention and young people facing eviction.



- This chart shows the responses of **40** organisations (75%) who could comment on the proportion of clients in unsafe housing throughout the pandemic.
- 13 respondents (25%) did not know roughly how many of their clients were in unsafe housing.



- For the 46 respondents who answered this question, the most common housing safety issues clients are presenting with are **lack of internet access** (83%), and **unable to social distance** (78%), followed by **sharing bathroom/kitchen with people not in their household** (61%), **lack of outdoor space** 57%, and **overcrowding** 54%.

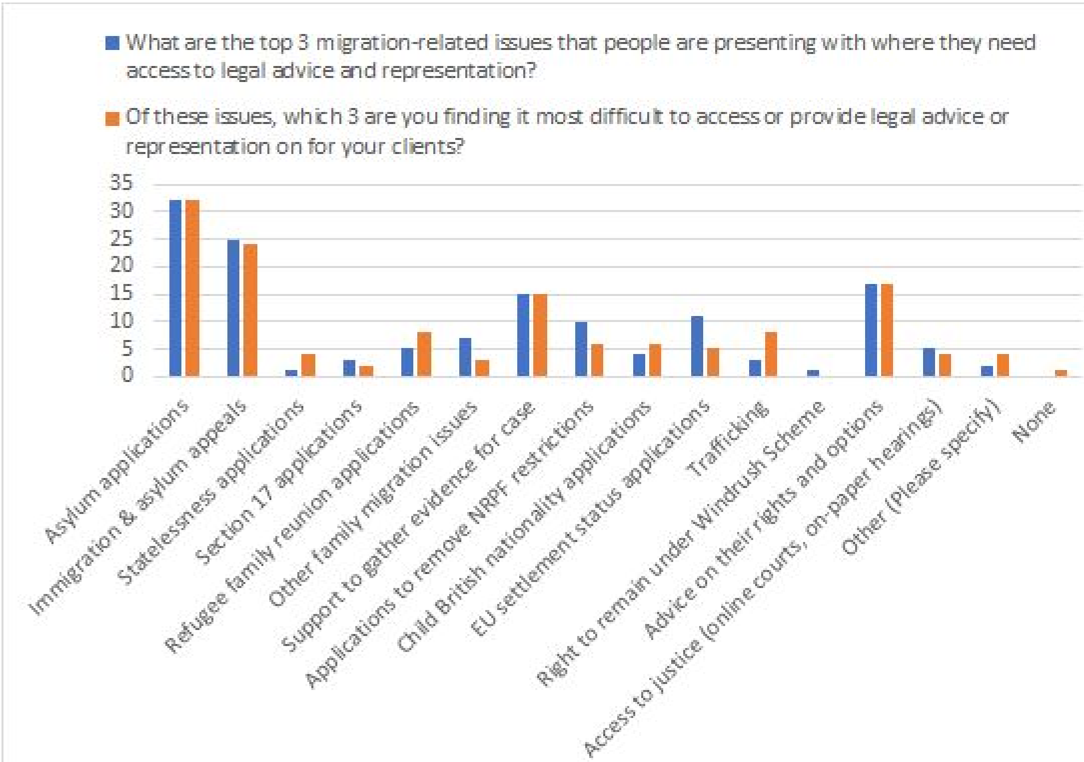
- As well as 48% of respondents reporting **risks of abuse and safeguarding concerns**, one written response raised a concern that hotels and hostels where asylum seekers are staying are being targeted by drug dealers, to exploit people who need cash in exchange for transporting drugs.

- A respondent working with **EU nationals reported that their pre-existing vulnerability to exploitation by 'rogue landlords'**, leading to overcrowded, unstable and otherwise unsafe, or illegal, living arrangements, were more dangerous during the pandemic.

- One respondent reported mothers having to break lockdown as being at home with children all the time led to relationship breakdown with other families sharing accomodation.

- Immigration detention was raised in **'other'** as an particularly unsafe form of accommodation.

6. Legal Advice and Representation



- This graph shows correspondence between highest areas of need and areas in which organisations are finding most difficult to access support for clients and highlights unmet needs in **asylum applications, lodging fresh asylum claims and further representations**; **immigration and asylum appeals; advice on their rights and options** and **support to gather evidence for cases[3].**

- The data can also be considered in terms of the ratio of difficulty to need (not depicted in the graph above): **statelessness** and **trafficking** stand out as areas in which difficulty is reported at a higher rate than need - 4:1 for statelessness, 8:3 for trafficking - suggesting that while prevalence of these needs is relatively low, **organisations face a lot of difficulty in accessing or providing adequate advice when they do arise**.

- **Difficulty getting advice for complex/specific cases may be the result of pressures across the system**: lack of casework capacity and of good-quality legal aid solicitors, reduced access to advice due to closures and demand, and

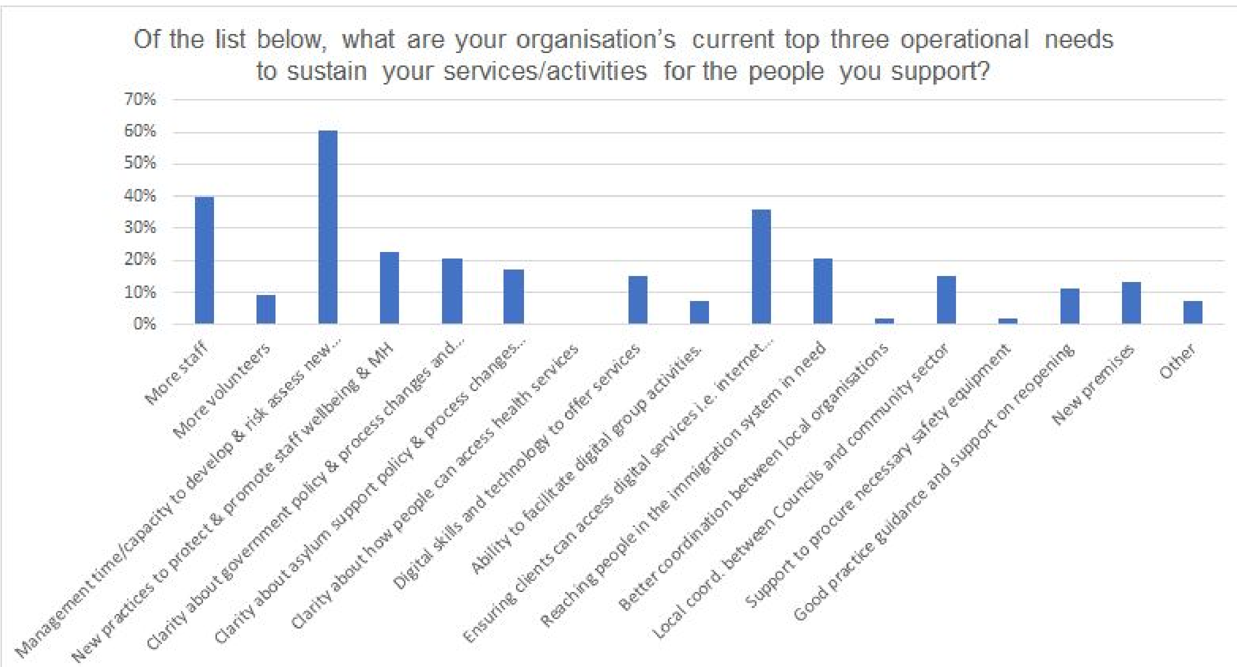
[3] These findings reflect that the majority of respondents to this survey are working with people within the asylum system.

the difficulties of handling complex cases remotely. This affects not only statelessness and trafficking, but also fresh claims with complicated backgrounds.

- Concerns were raised that clients with no English or complex mental health issues will continue to struggle or be unable to access suitable case support remotely while in-person provision is slow to restart.

- The data is not sufficient to give a clear picture of regional variation in legal access. However, two respondents - one in Newcastle, one in Manchester - told us they are able to access good legal advice for their clients, while Norwich was highlighted as an area with poor access to legal aid advice.

7. Operational needs of organisations in the migration field

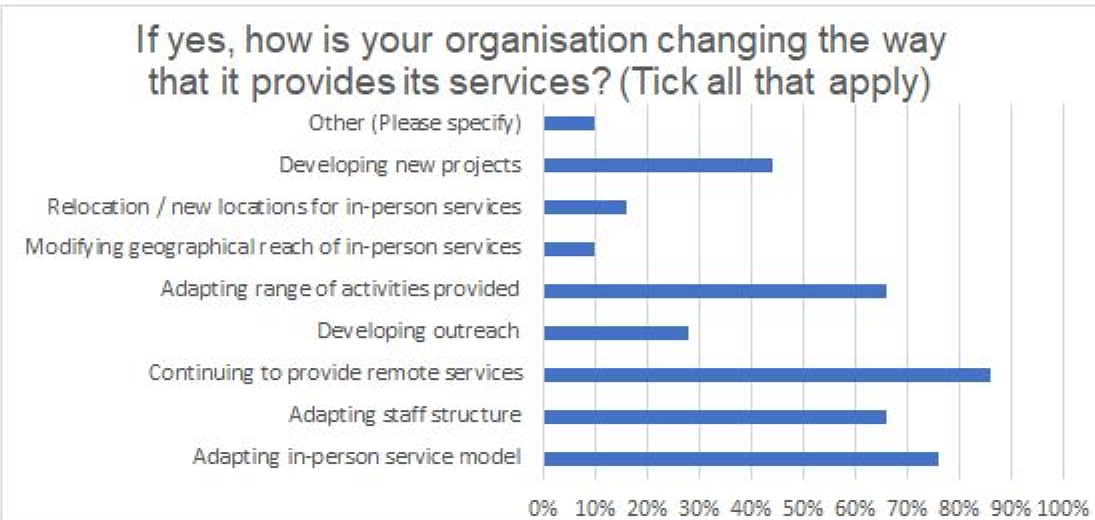


- **Management time/capacity** is the clear top need, reported in this survey period by 60% of organisations. This reflects the planning that many organisations are undertaking in order to prepare for reopening in-person services and making changes to their service delivery (discussed below). Two additional respondents mentioned that they need more time to develop remote working practices as an emerging need.

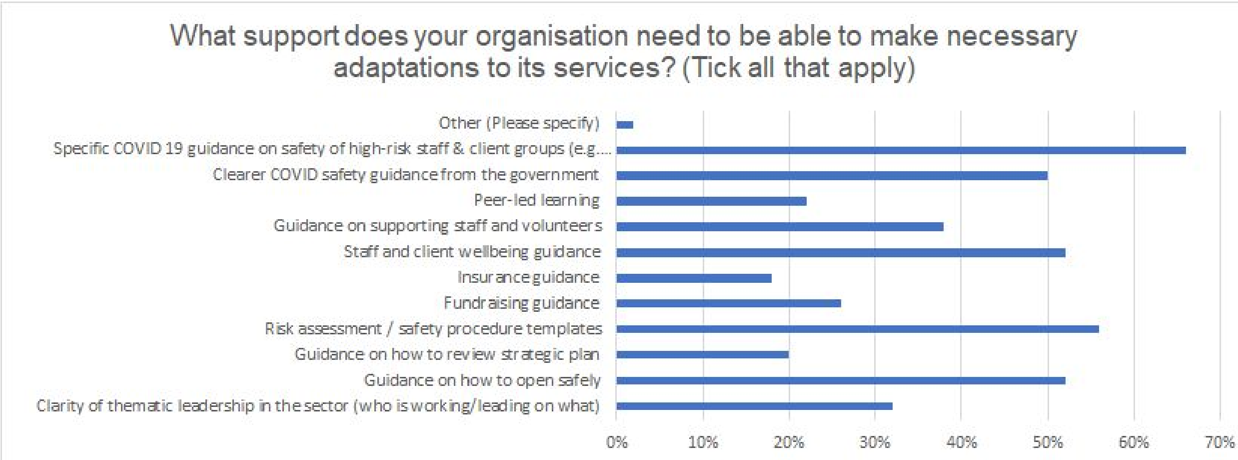
- This survey also suggests that **more staff** (40%) and **ensuring clients can access digital services** (36%) are key operational needs at this time.
- This survey period did not cover any government announcements on new guidance, reflected in a lower need for **clarity about government policy and process changes (housing, social care, health, immigration and justice)** and **about asylum support policy and process changes and their impact on clients** are than in Survey 4 which captured the end of lockdown.

8. Adaptation of Services

- 94% of respondents (50) said they **are making long term changes to services as we enter the 'recovery period'**.



- The most common ways that organisations are changing how they provide services are **continuing to provide remote services** (86%), **adapting in -person service** (76%), **adapting staff structure** (66%) and **adapting range of activities provided** (66%).
- In **'Other'** - two respondents mentioned 'renting more space', another mentioned increased partnership working with other agencies. It is worth noting here that enhanced multi-agency working was also mentioned as a measure taken to respond to client's mental health and wellbeing needs, in part 4.
- In emerging or other operational needs, one respondent reported needing to develop better ways of remote information sharing



- The top support need where organisations could select multiple was for **specific guidance on high risk groups** (66%), closely followed by a cluster of other commonly reported support needs, **risk assessment/safety procedures** 56%, **guidance on opening safely** (52%), **staff and client wellbeing guidance** (52%), **clearer COVID and safety procedures from government** (50%).

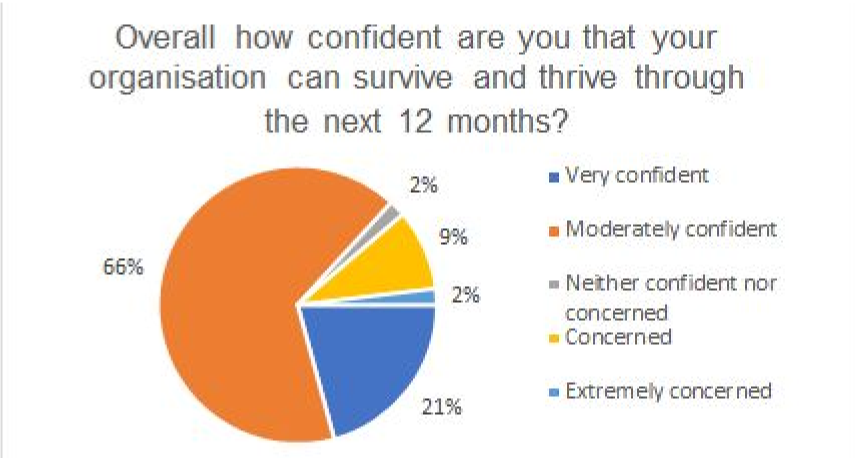
9. Lived Experience and the Adaptation of Services

- 81% participants told us that **people with lived experience of the asylum, refugee or migration systems are informing the development/adaptation of their services during the COVID-19 crisis.**

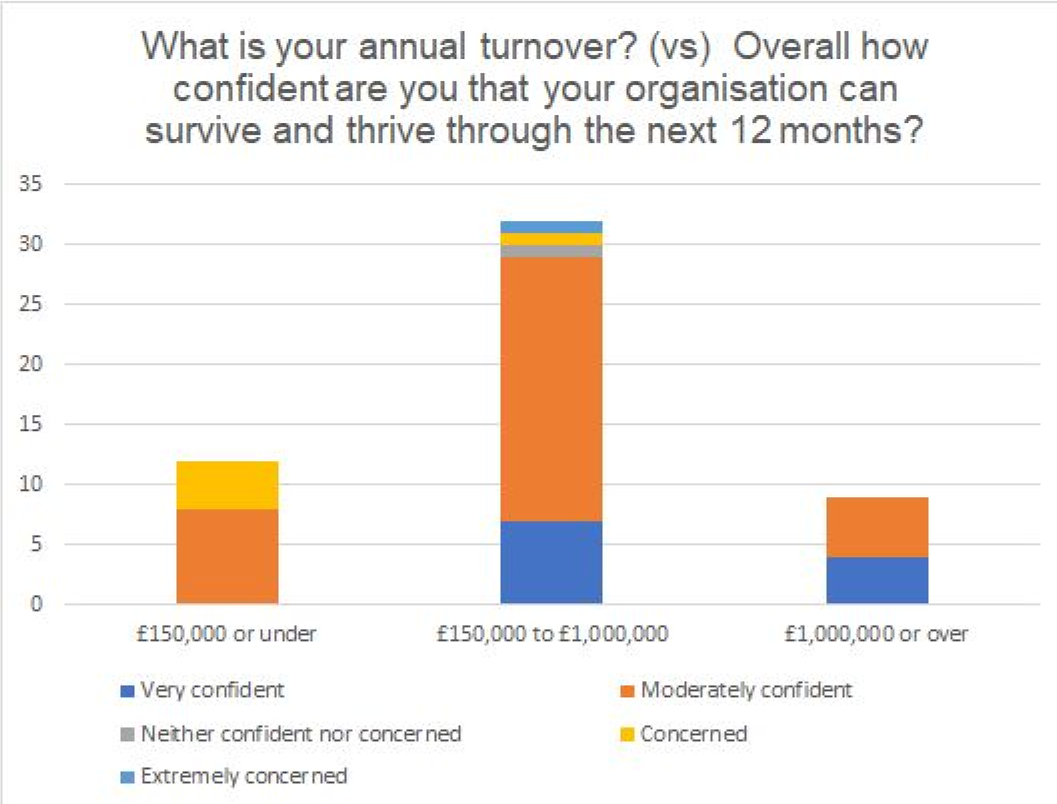
- We asked respondents to provide further information about how they are doing this. 18 mentioned having people with lived experience in different roles in the organisation (trustees, staff members, volunteers), three others mentioned specific recruitment strategies to increase representation of lived experience among staff teams.

- Specific mechanisms being taken to ensure that people with lived experience, notably clients, can inform the development/ adaptation of services include: consultations (formal and informal) mentioned by 12 respondents; mechanisms to gain client feedback (6); surveys and similar data collection methods (9); committees/ advisory groups (6); capacity building (2); one respondent is a ‘by and for’ organisation and another is doing outreach to community groups.

10. Confidence



- The majority of organisations are **moderately confident** (66%).
- The results from this survey show an increase of organisations feeling moderately confident (+11%) and a decrease in reports of neither confident nor concerned (-14%) since Survey 4. The same level of reports of organisations feeling **very confident** (21%) as Survey 4 which was carried out between 18th - 30th June (just after lockdown began to ease - shops opening etc). It is worth noting that the time period that respondents were asked to reflect on has changed from 6 months to 12 months.
- Organisations who reported feeling **moderately confident** again explained that the supportive and flexible response from funders was a significant factor, although several also referred to a ‘cliff edge’ in terms of funding and what will follow ‘emergency funding’. Secure funding for the next 12 months was referenced by organisations who feel **very confident.** Those **concerned,** mentioned waiting for funders to restart usual funding routes and being dependent on volunteers and concerns about certain groups of volunteers.



- The graph above shows the distribution of confidence levels by turnover.
- Smaller organisations, with a turnover of £150,000 or less a year, are least confident: 33% of them (4) said that they were ‘**concerned**’, compared to only 3% of medium-sized organisations, and no large organisations.
- 22% of medium-sized organisations and 44% of large organisations are ‘**very confident**’.

Section 2: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on New Scots and refugee-assisting organisations in Scotland

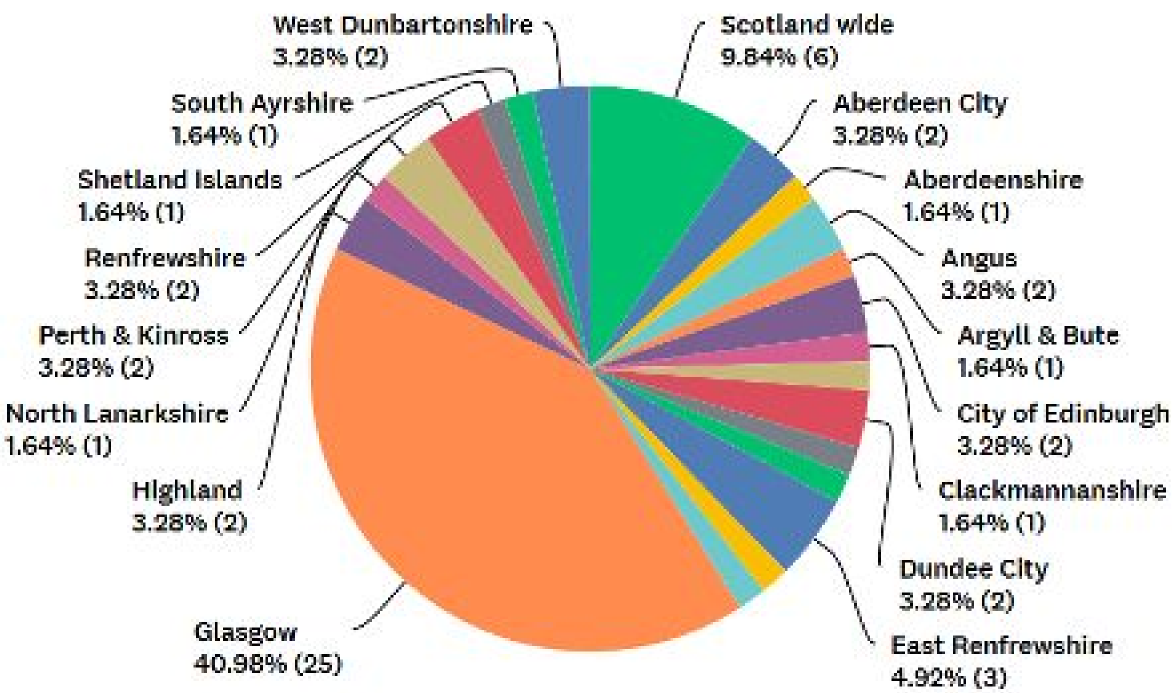
Further to the contribution from Scotland to the hub report #2 in May, Scottish Refugee Council launched two surveys in Scotland on 8 July 2020 to understand the impacts that COVID-19 has had on individual refugees and the organisations that support them in Scotland[4].

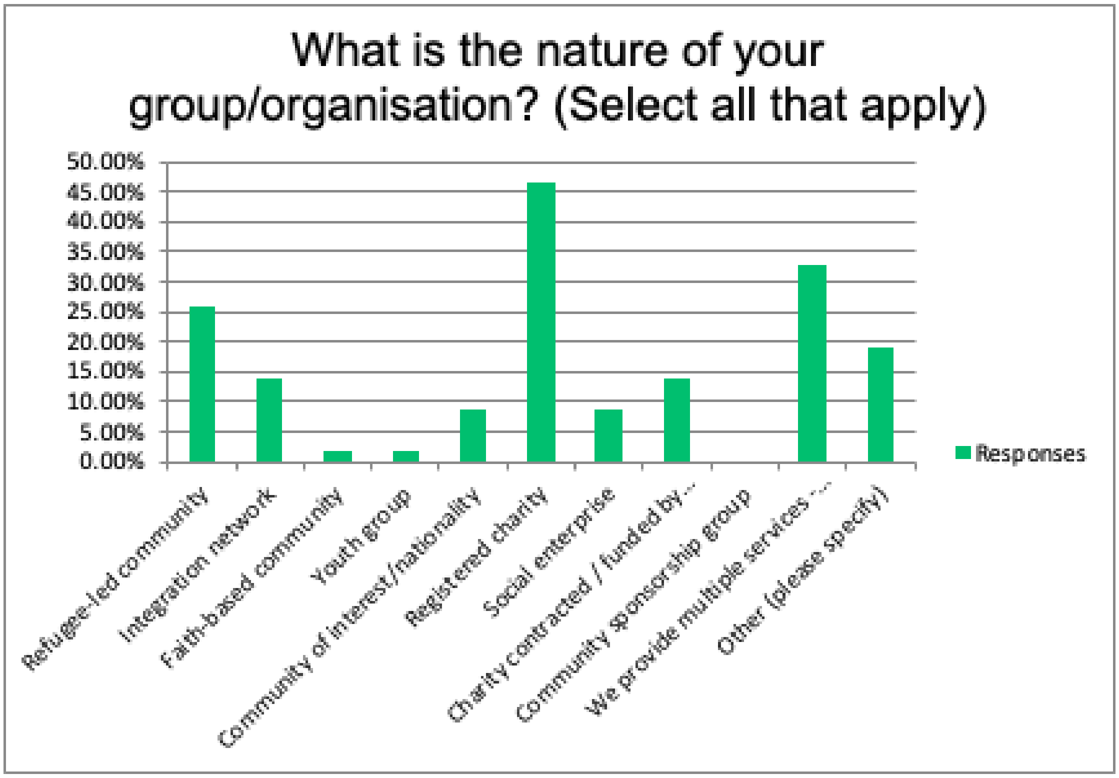
The online individual survey is available in 10 languages as well as English and seeks to understand issues around digital inclusion, self-reported physical and mental health, perceptions of safety (following the Glasgow attack) and understanding and ability to manage government measures to limit the spread of COVID. This survey is also being completed through Scottish Refugee Council volunteers who are using it as a method to ‘check-in’ with targeted service users. The primary data collection period is 8 July – Friday 24 July 2020. To date 233 refugees have completed the survey. The organisational survey has been completed by 61 organisations. An initial analysis report of both surveys will be published in mid-August, focussing on analysis by gender and immigration status. The data will further support two academic studies being conducted by Glasgow University and Queen Margaret University.

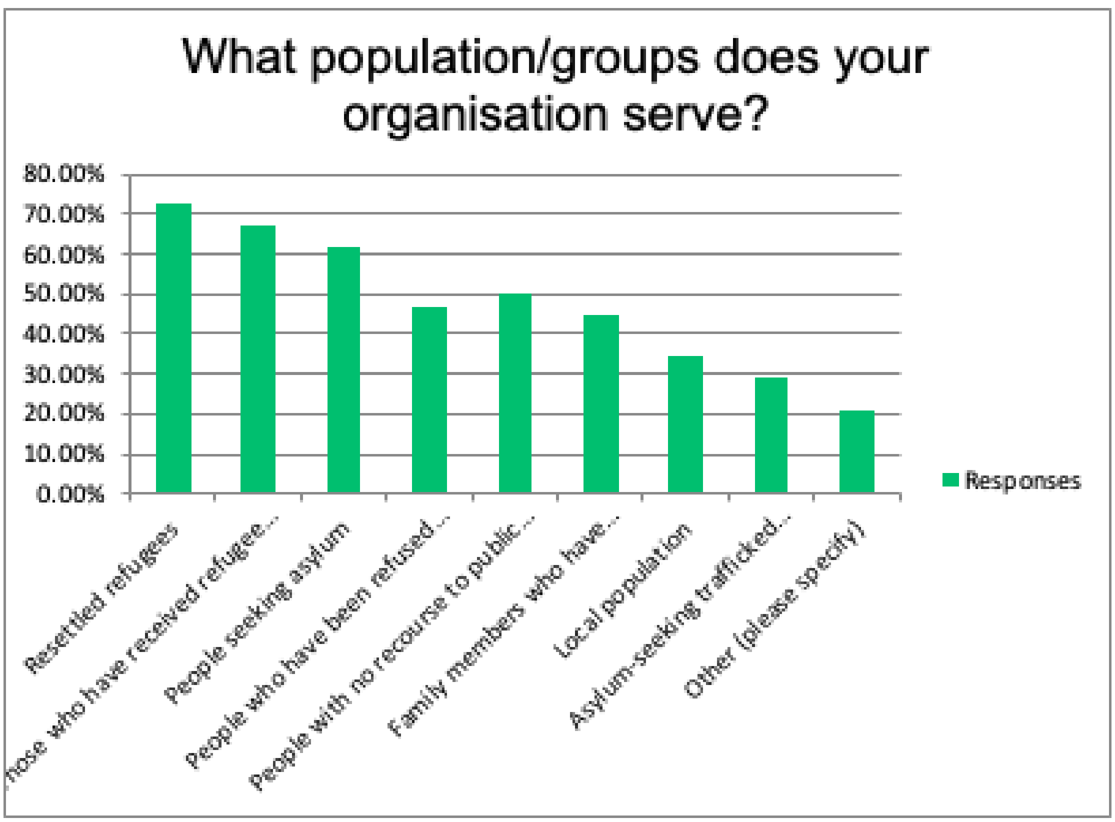
Below is a snapshot of some of the organisational survey data captured to date.

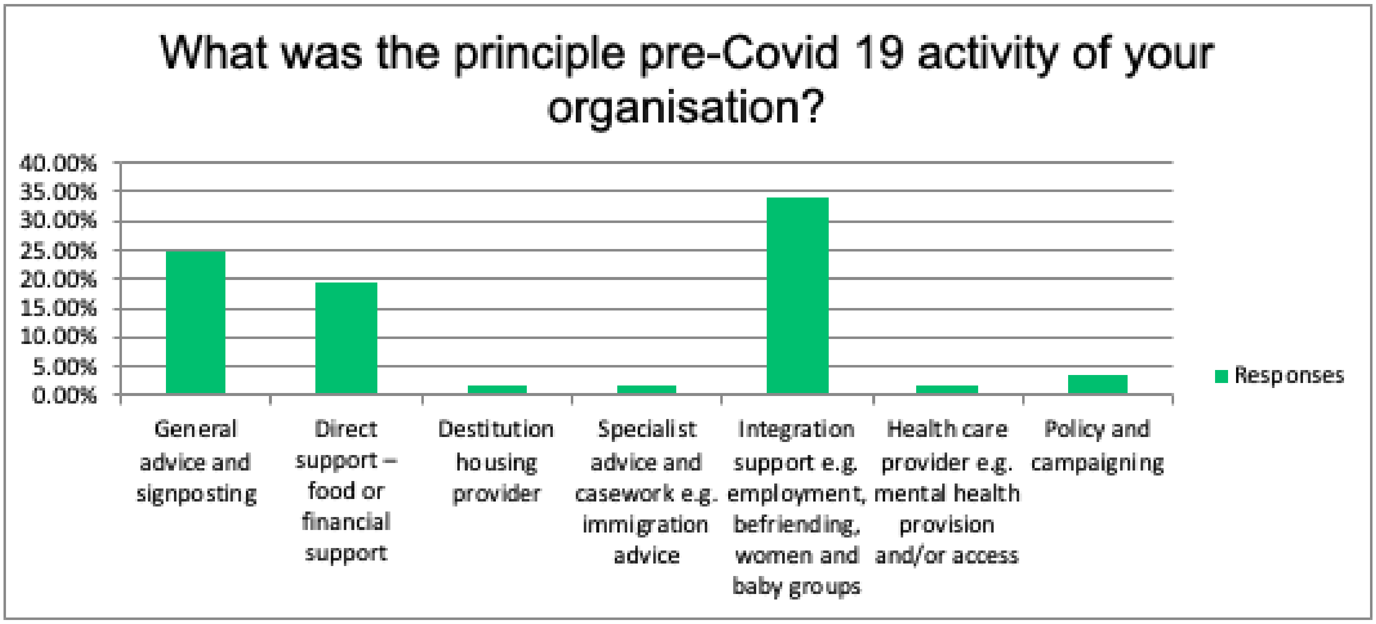
[4] https://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/understanding-impact-covid-19-new-scots/

Where do you operate?

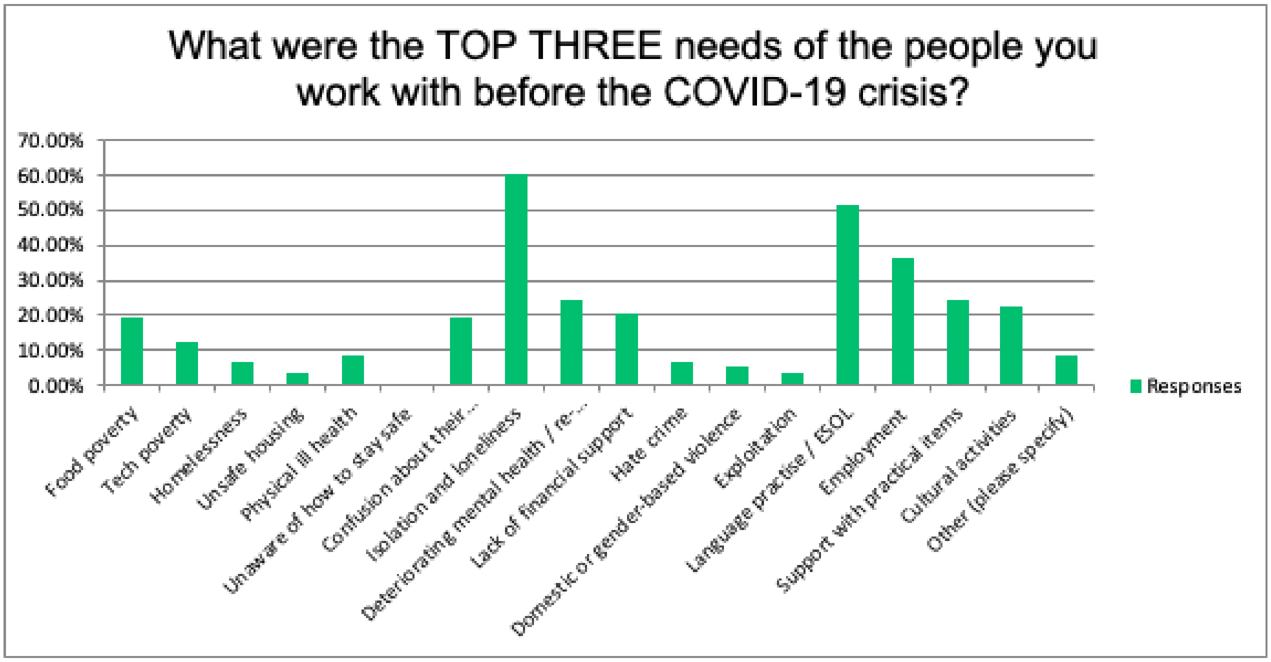


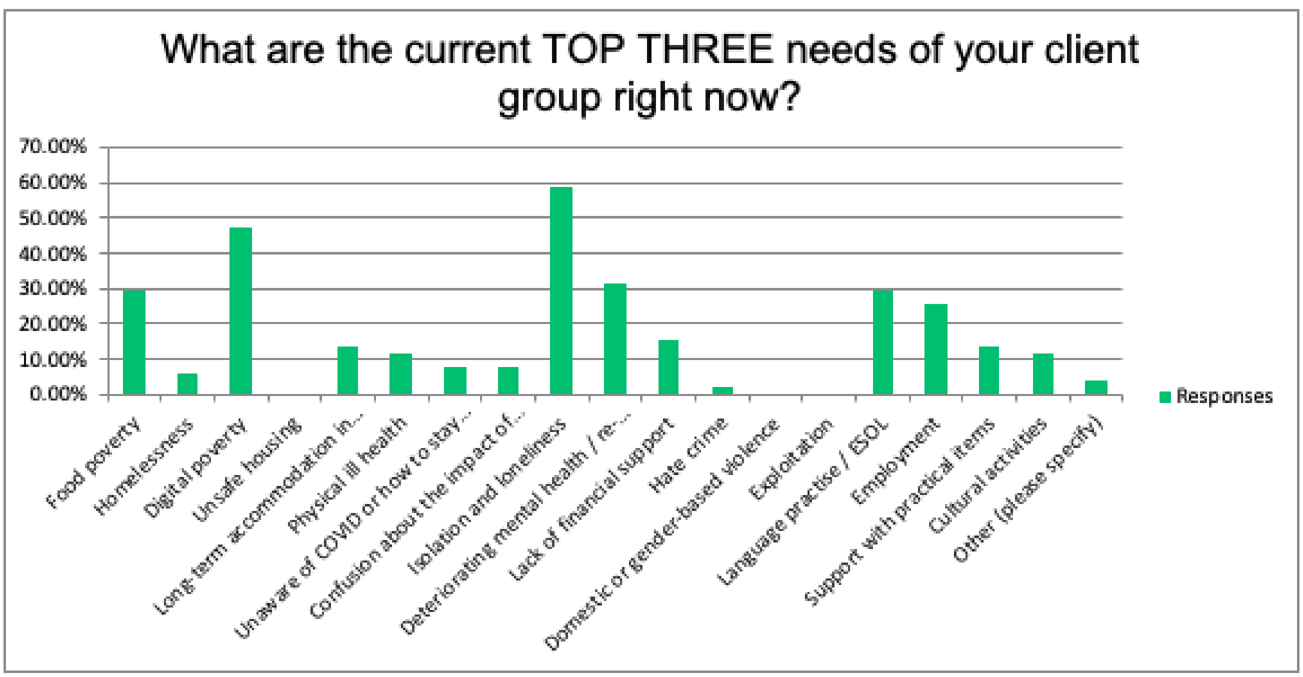

What is the nature of your group/organisation? (Select all that apply)
50.00%
45.00%
40.00%
35.00%
30.00%
25.00%
20.00%
15.00%
10.00%
5.00%
0.00%
Refugee-led community
Integration network
Faith-based community
Youth group
Community of interest/nationality
Registered charity
Social enterprise
Charity contracted / funded by...
Community sponsorship group
We provide multiple services -...
Other (please specify)
Responses

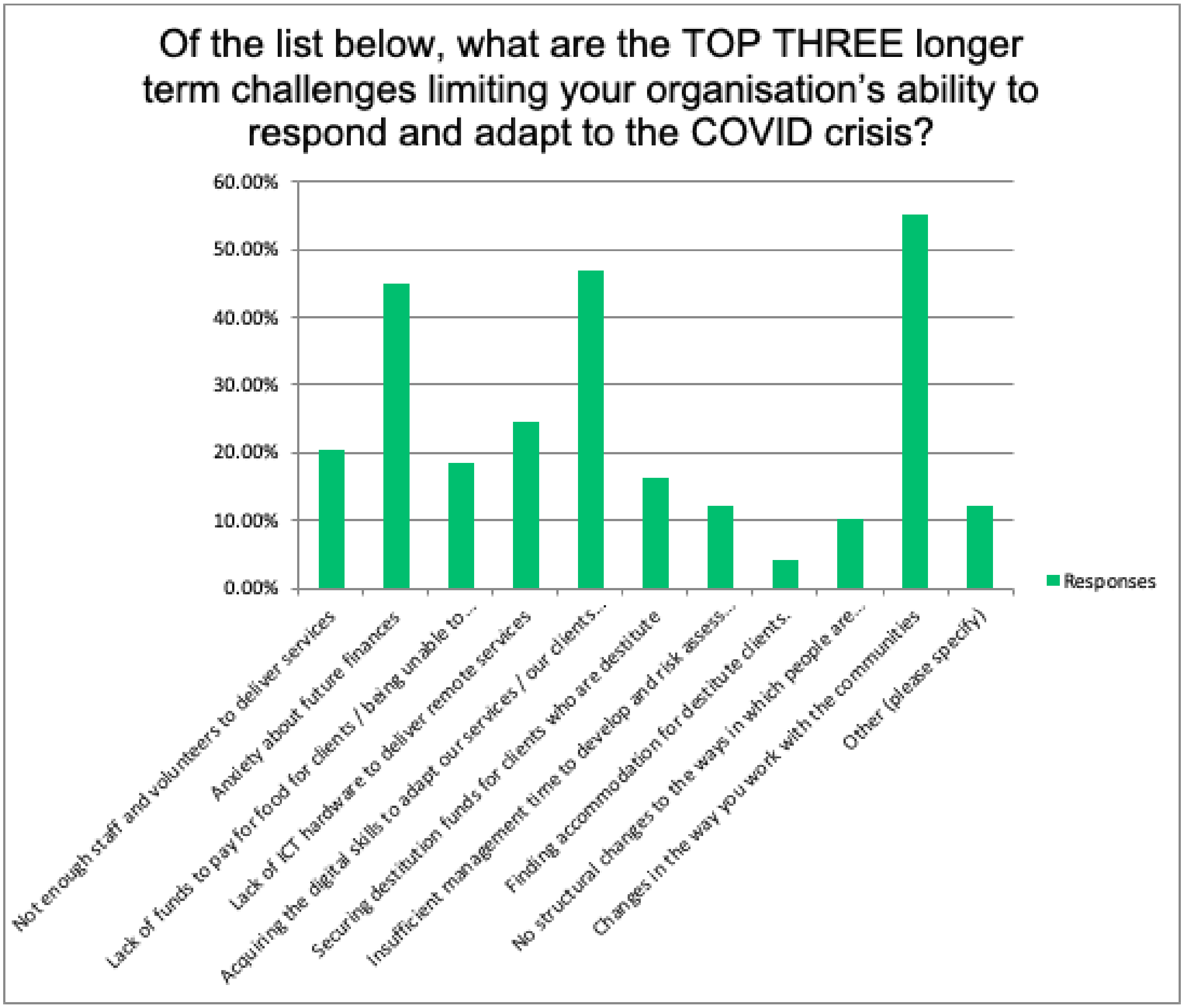

What population/groups does your organisation serve?
80.00%
70.00%
60.00%
50.00%
40.00%
30.00%
20.00%
10.00%
0.00%
Resettled refugees
hose who have received refugee...
People seeking asylum
People who have been refused...
People with no recourse to public...
Family members who have...
Local population
Asylum-seeking trafficked...
Other (please specify)
Responses



On average groups provide on average six different types of services or integration activities.


What were the TOP THREE needs of the people you work with before the COVID-19 crisis?
70.00%
60.00%
50.00%
40.00%
30.00%
20.00%
10.00%
0.00%
Food poverty
Tech poverty
Homelessness
Unsafe housing
Physical ill health
Unaware of how to stay safe
Confusion about their...
Isolation and loneliness
Deteriorating mental health / re-...
Lack of financial support
Hate crime
Domestic or gender-based violence
Exploitation
Language practise / ESOL
Employment
Support with practical items
Cultural activities
Other (please specify)
Responses


What are the current TOP THREE needs of your client group right now?
70.00%
60.00%
50.00%
40.00%
30.00%
20.00%
10.00%
0.00%
Food poverty
Homelessness
Digital poverty
Unsafe housing
Long-term accommodation in...
Physical ill health
Unaware of COVID or how to stay...
Confusion about the impact of...
Isolation and loneliness
Deteriorating mental health / re-...
Lack of financial support
Hate crime
Domestic or gender-based violence
Exploitation
Language practise / ESOL
Employment
Support with practical items
Cultural activities
Other (please specify)
Responses


Of the list below, what are the TOP THREE longer term challenges limiting your organisation's ability to respond and adapt to the COVID crisis?
60.00%
50.00%
40.00%
30.00%
20.00%
10.00%
0.00%
Responses
Not enough staff and volunteers to deliver services
Anxiety about future finances
Lack of funds to pay for food for clients / being unable to...
Lack of ICT hardware to deliver remote services
Acquiring the digital skills to adapt our services / our clients...
Securing destitution funds for clients who are destitute
Insufficient management time to develop and risk assess...
Finding accommodation for destitute clients.
No structural changes to the ways in which people are...
Changes in the way you work with the communities
Other (please specify)