

**Assessing voluntary experience (AVE) in
a professional perspective
Leonardo da Vinci programme (2003-2006)**

Report from Poland

Basic information about the study

This study makes a part of the
**‘Assessing voluntary experience in a professional perspective’
in the Leonardo da Vinci programme (2003 – 2006).**

The objective of this consultation (2004) was to estimate how much the organisations would be interested in voluntary experience assessment as well as to establish a network of organisations to test the proposed tool and method in 2005.

With voluntary work becoming more and more popular in Poland, many NGOs and public organisations begin their cooperation with volunteers. Since the tradition of such cooperation is not very long (with volunteering being understood as an unpaid for activity for the benefit of others, done consciously and of one’s own free will), organisations have developed different methods of involving volunteers in their operations.

Purposefully, the word ‘methods’ rather than ‘models’ has been used here as it is rather hard now to talk about a model of cooperation with volunteers, understood as a well-organised, and well-established set of rules governing the issue.

It should be mentioned however that the activity of such organisations as Volunteer Centres – grounded on the Act on Voluntary Initiatives adopted by the Polish parliament – can help develop coherent and well considered policies to support the often chaotic and spontaneous operation in this area. Thus, it should be believed that soon we will be able to talk about a Polish model of cooperation with volunteers.

The study whose results are presented in the following section was an attempt to collect information about the conditions and characteristic features of cooperation with volunteers in Poland.

In the study, we tried to gather the information that would be further used in the AVE project to define the framework of a kind of portfolio – a certificate describing the skills and experiences developed by volunteers during their social involvement. When prepared, the portfolio, identical for all countries of the European Union, would allow standardisation of such experiences on the EU labour market as well as in voluntary initiatives.

Needless to say, the unified common document would offer a range of benefits.

The study covered 56 NGOs and public institutions cooperating with volunteers across the country. The geographical scope of the study is relevant, as the collected information allows us to compare the situation in big cities and small towns located far from urban areas.

The participants of the study were selected by Regional Volunteer Centres. The study was done in October – November 2004.

It is worth noticing that no detailed examination of volunteers' cooperation with NGOs and public institutions is conducted in Poland. The issue is only touched upon during the studies on the condition of the third sector in Poland implemented by the KLON/JAWOR Association. www.badania.ngo.pl

The key findings of the 2004 study:

- Volunteers support the activity of 44.4% organisations in Poland. The figure shows that the number of organisations involving volunteers has slightly decreased (by 2.6%) in relation to the previous test periods.
- In every second organisation that cooperates with volunteers, the number of volunteers during the last year did not exceed 10 people.
- In another 27% of the organisations, the number of volunteers was between 11 and 30. More than 100 volunteers were involved in 5% of organisations during the last year.
- The total number of volunteers supporting different organisations in 2004 (and not being their members) is estimated to exceed 1 million.
- In 2004, organisations declared cooperation with a slightly smaller number of volunteers than in 2002.
- In 2004 the number of organisations that declared cooperation with not more than 5 volunteers grew by 8% and the number of organisations that cooperated with over 60 volunteers during the last year decreased by 4%.'

The condition of the third sector in Poland, the KLON/JAWOR Association, 2004

The study implemented as a part of the AVE project is the first attempt to analyse the principles of cooperation with volunteers and the skills developed by them as well as to assess their work and methods used to prepare them to play specific functions in the organisation.

The execution of the study – the interviews made by interviewers

The character of the Polish study:

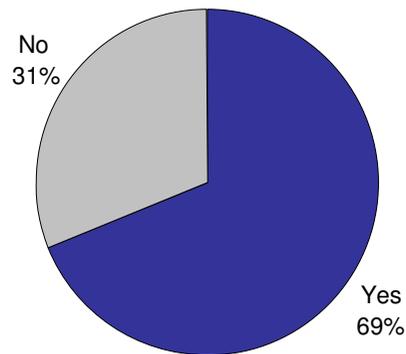
- Most organisations cooperating with volunteers would not see their activity in the context of 'gaining experience in a professional perspective'
- Such approach is more noticeable in big cities rather than small towns
- Volunteers active in organisations do not perceive their involvement in these categories either – their main motivation is to become involved in meaningful social initiatives and to help those that need support
- NGOs and public institutions are not willing to take part in studies
- Most Polish organisations do not have the function of the volunteer coordinator – the manager of volunteers – so the respondents in the study were not always competent enough and able to provide comprehensive answers.

Area of activity

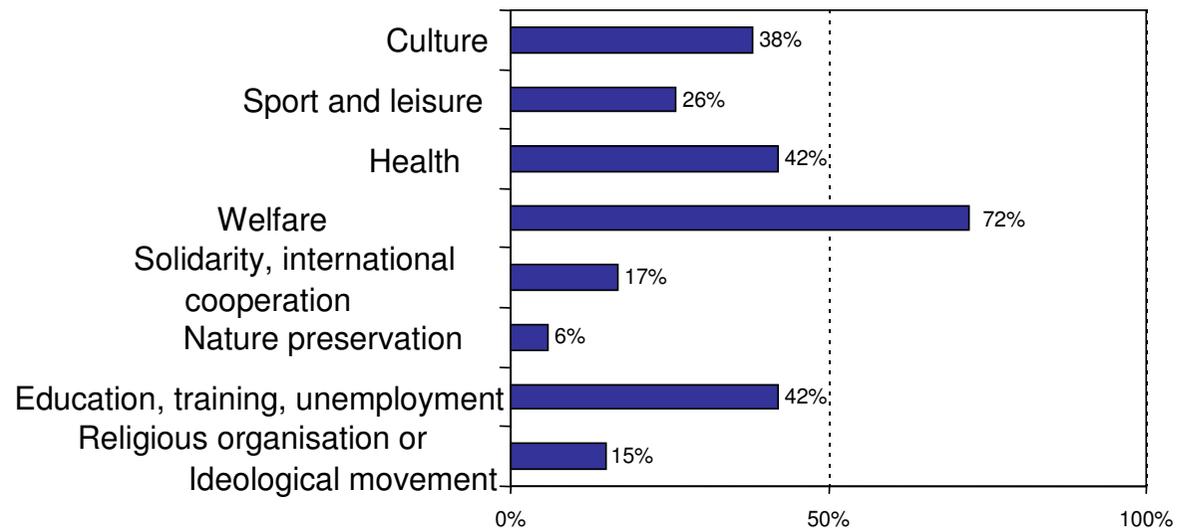
The majority of the organisations covered by the study have welfare profile. Most of them deal with health, education, training, unemployment and culture.

In most cases, the entities centres interviewed are associated with other organisations.

Are you associated with some other organisation?

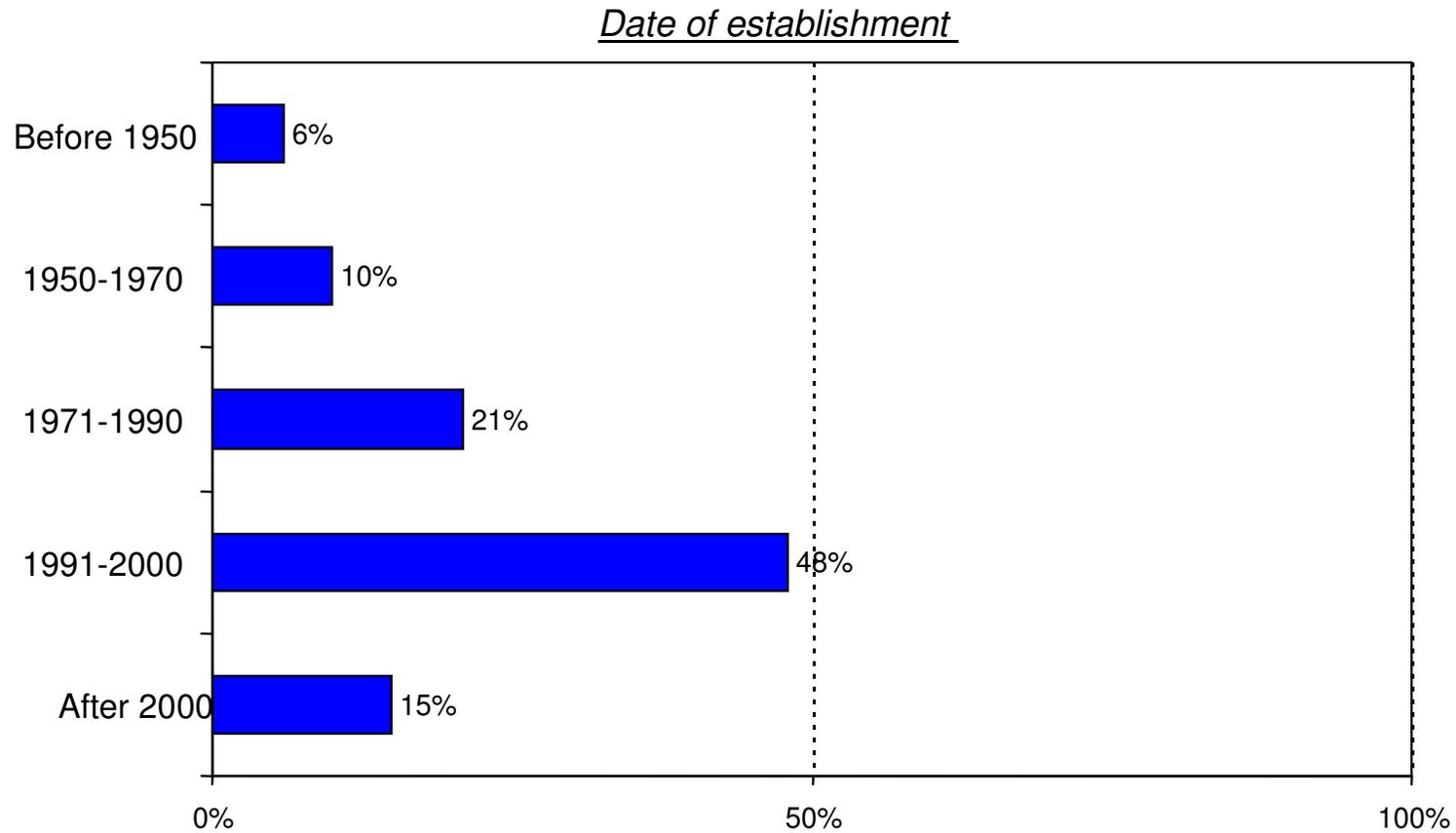


Area of activity



Time of establishment

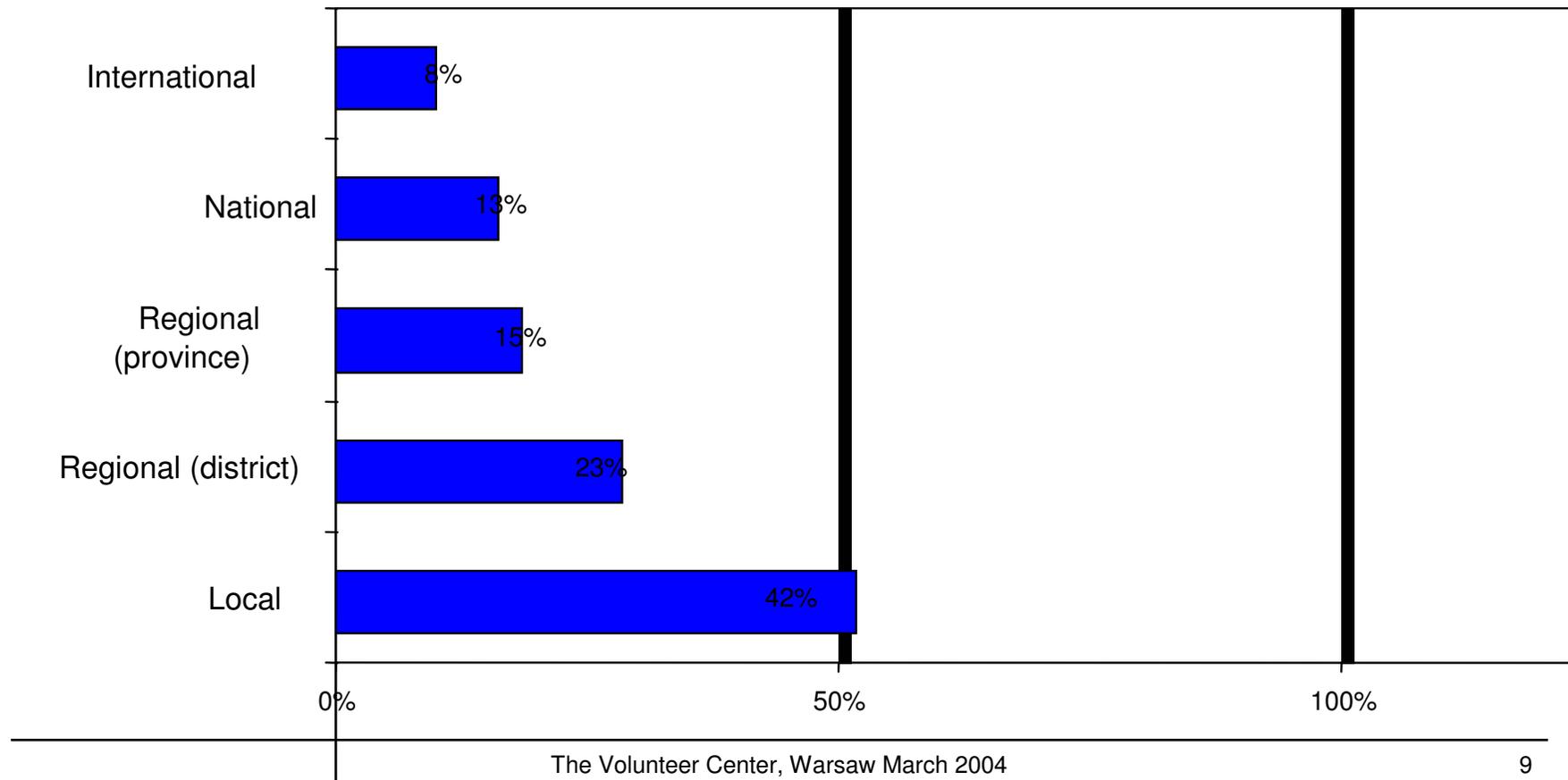
Almost half of the organisations were established between 1991 and 2000.



Geographic area of activity

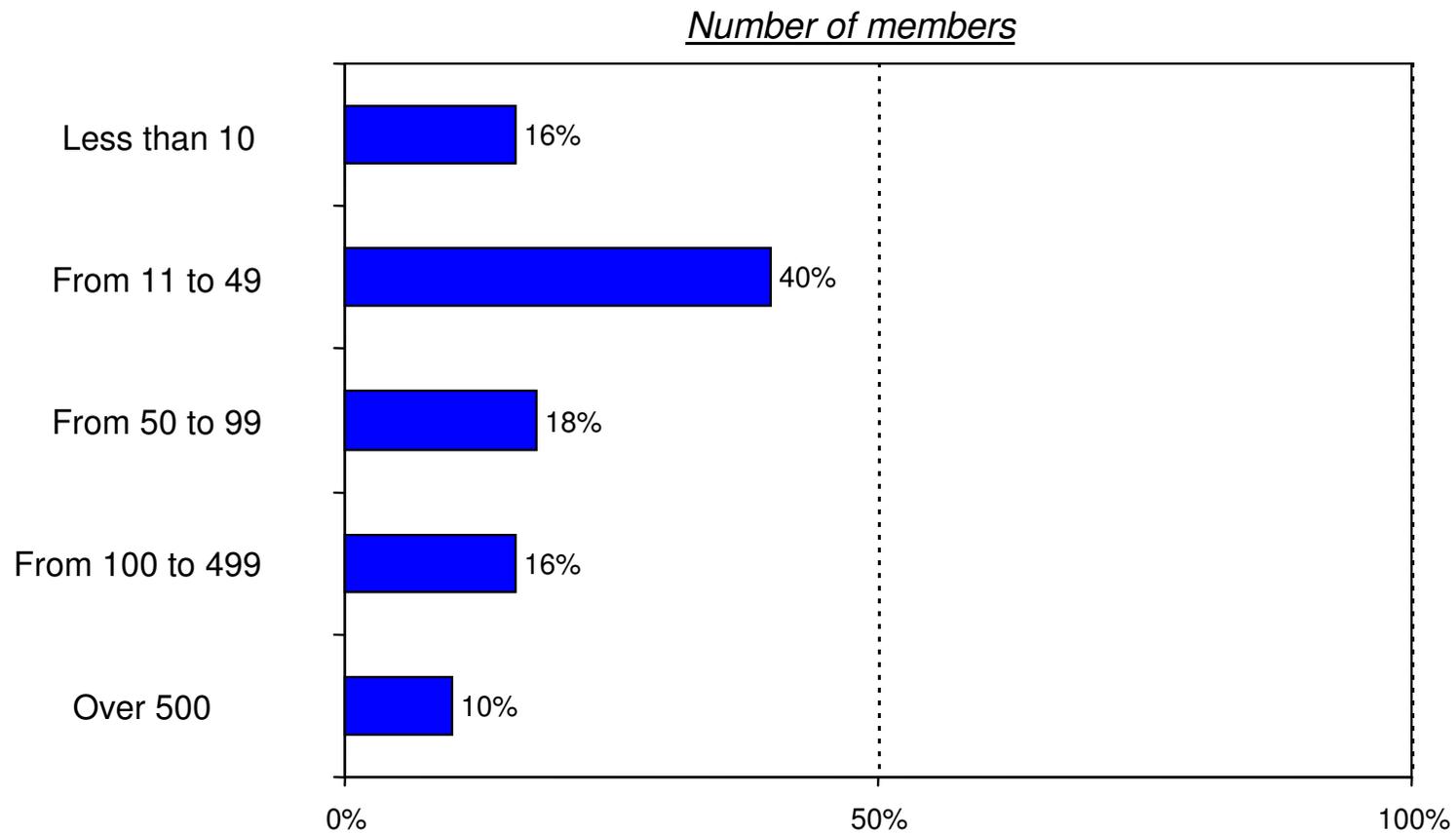
The majority of the organisations covered by the study operate locally.

Geographic scope



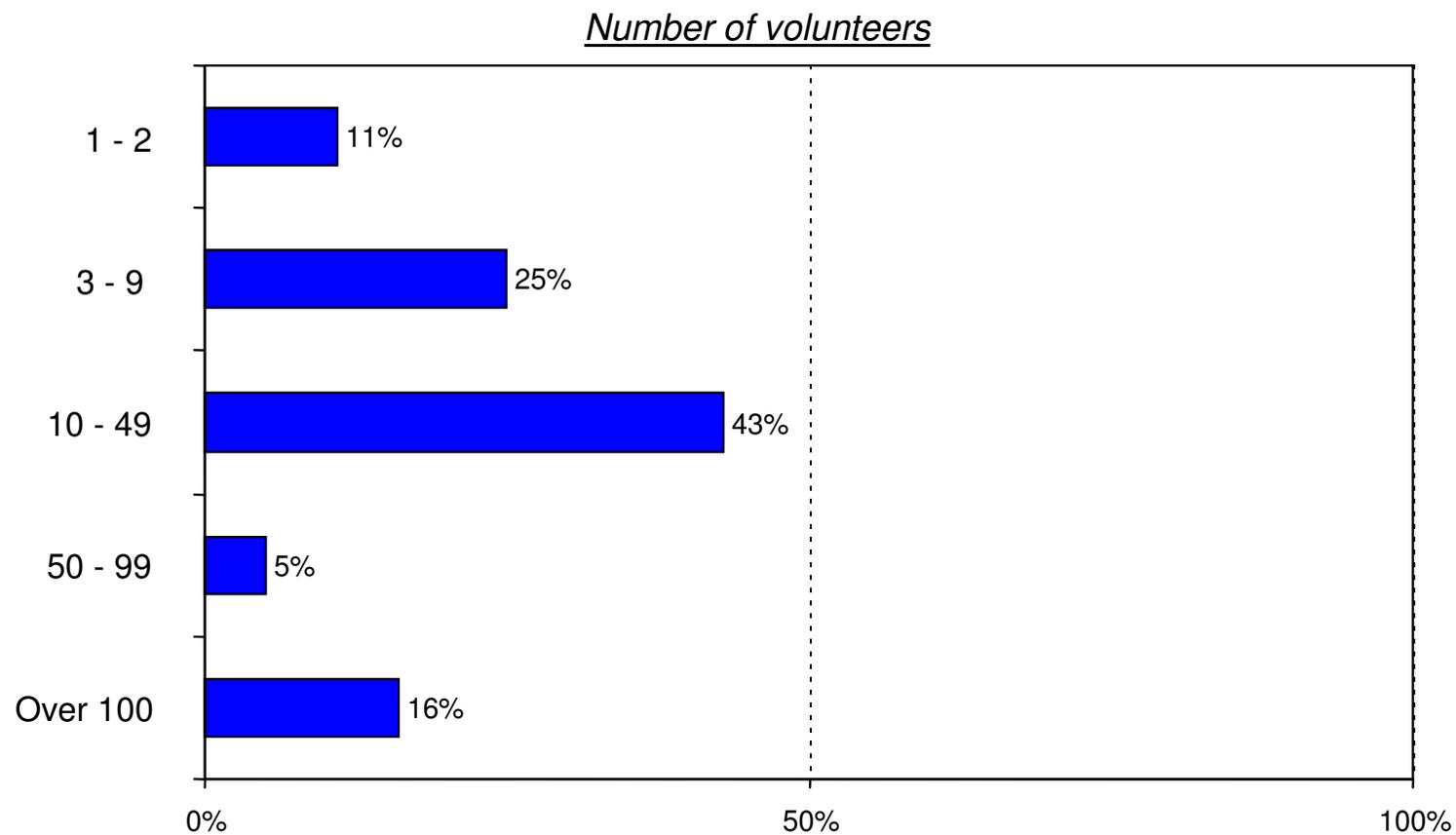
Membership

Most of the organisations covered by the study have from 11 to 49 members



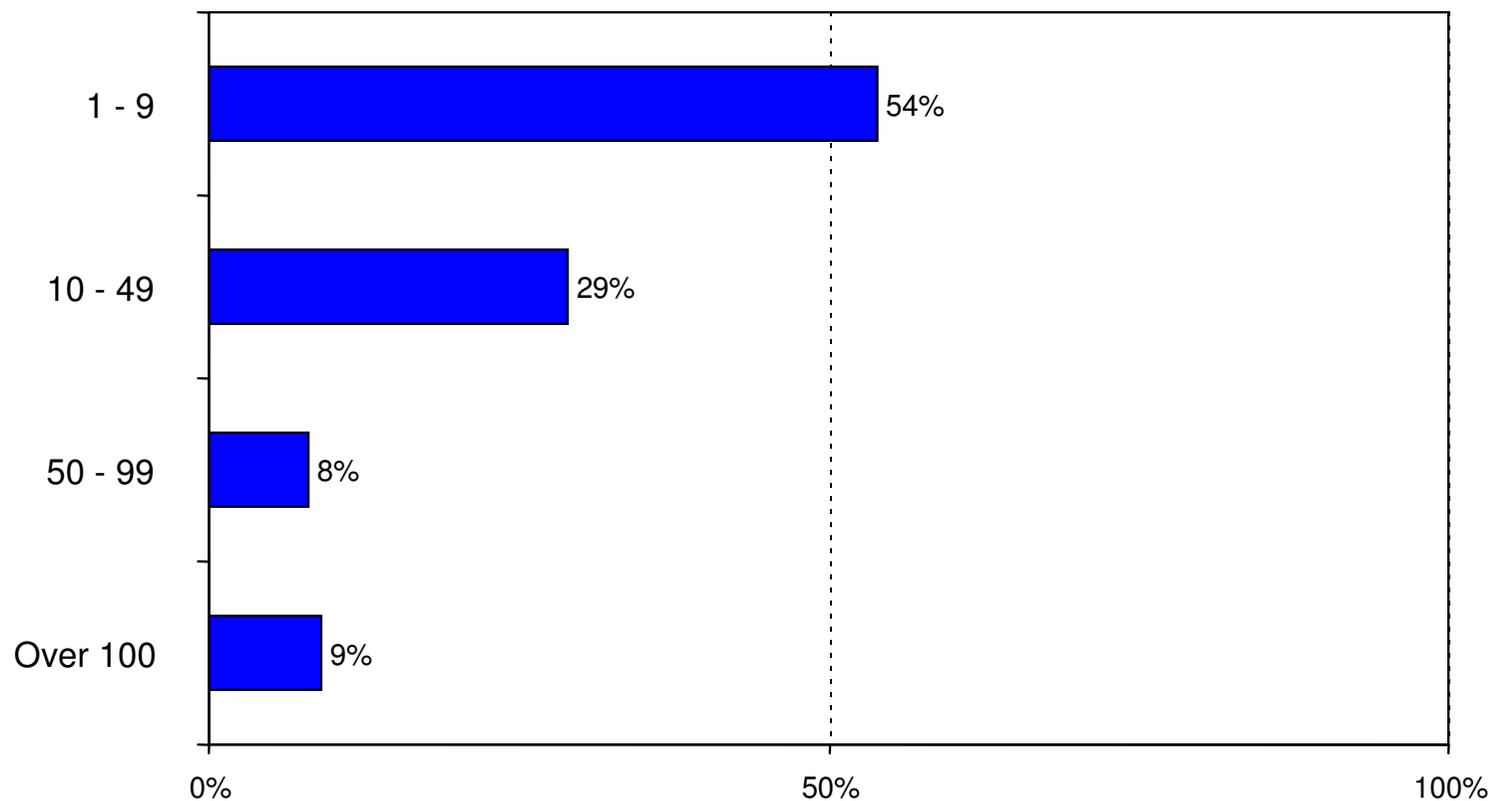
Number of volunteers

The organisations covered by the study usually cooperate with 10 to 49 volunteers.



Number of paid employees

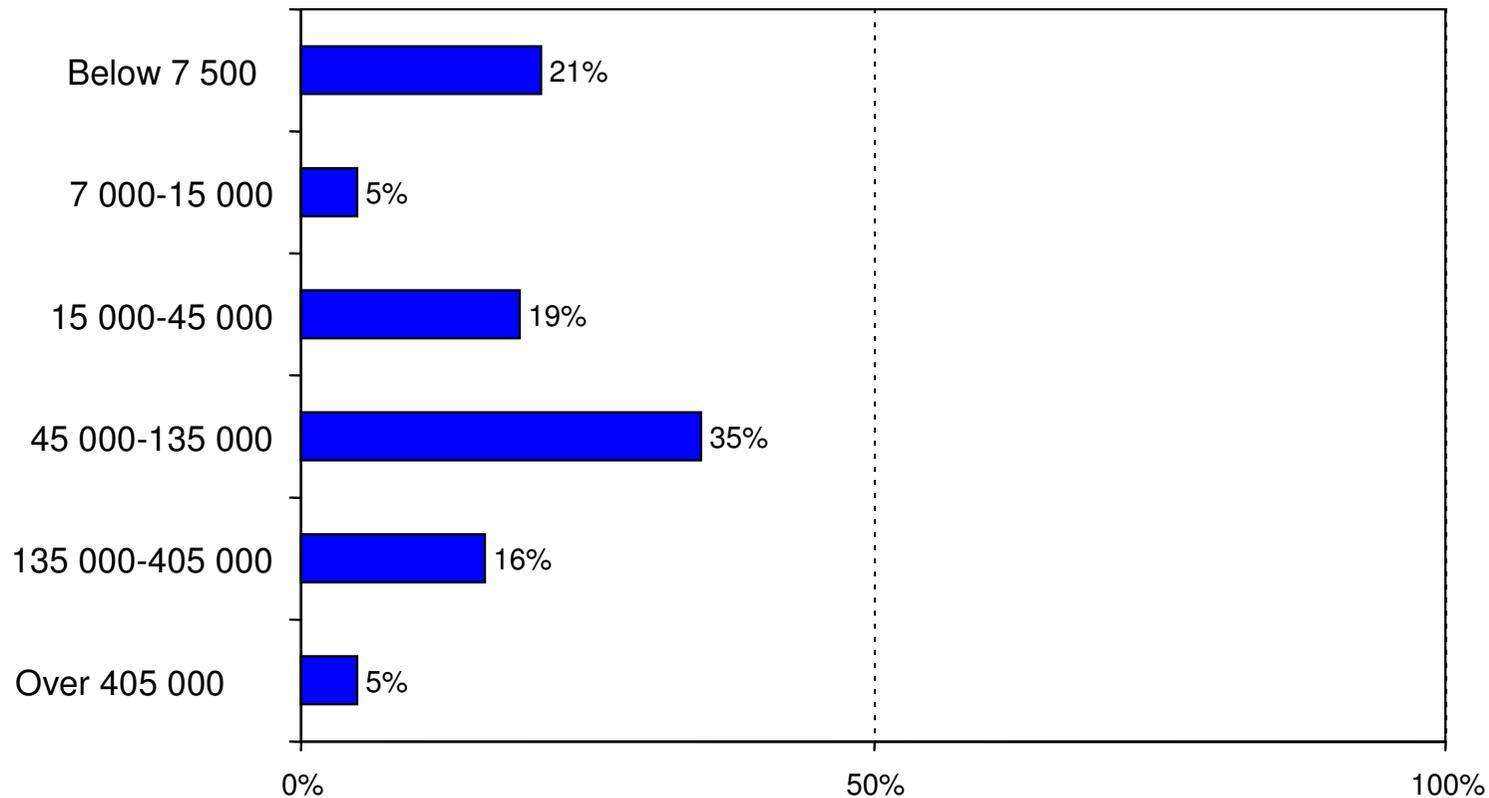
More than a half of the organisations covered by the study employ between 1 and 9 people (employees, co operators, independent partners).
Number of paid employees



Annual budget

The annual budgets of the organisations interviewed vary significantly, however the biggest group of organisations would have a budget between 45 000 and 135 000 euro.

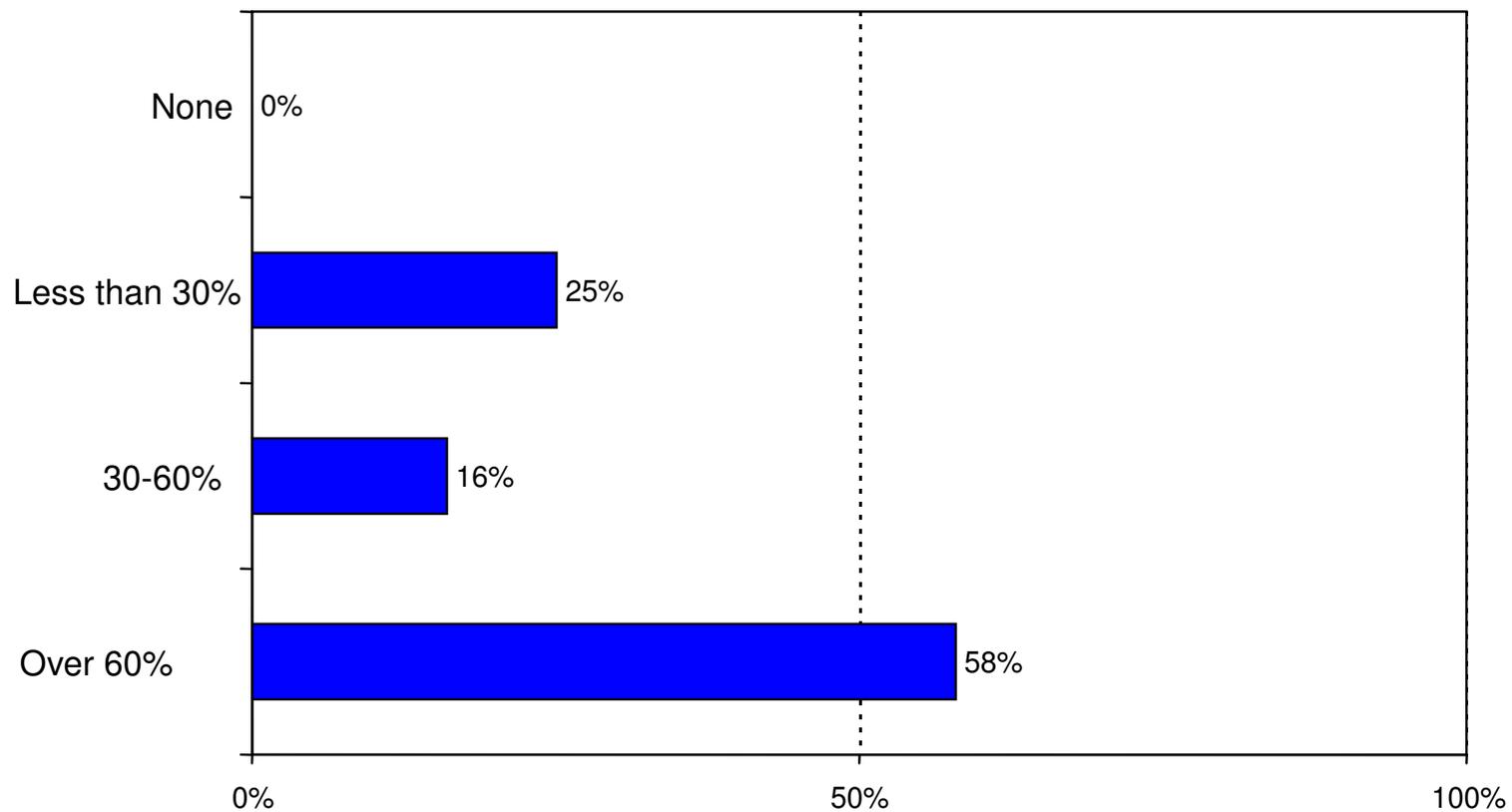
Annual budget (in euro)



Cooperating volunteer profile

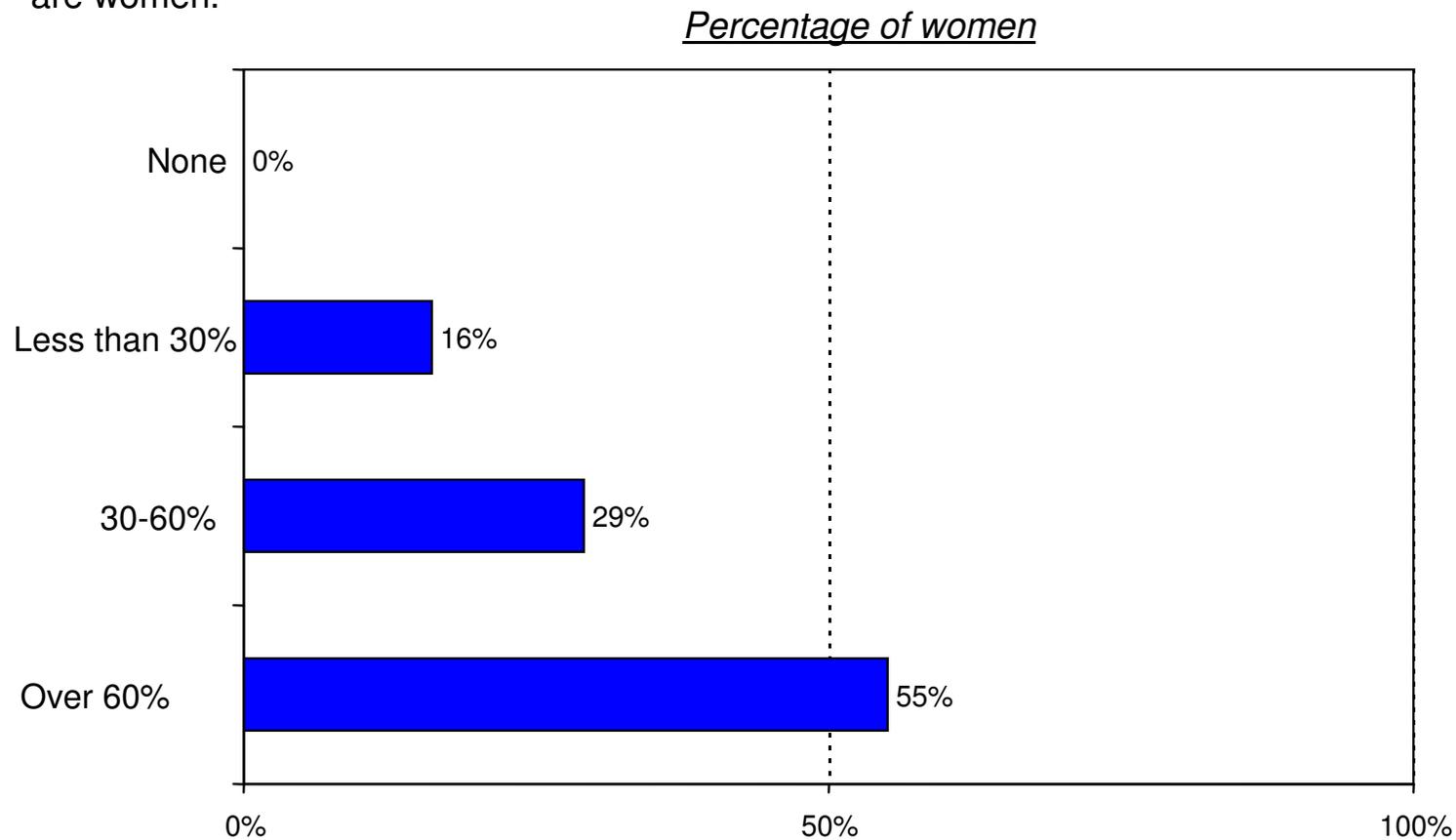
In more than a half of the organisations covered by the study, over 60% of the cooperating volunteers are young people.

Percentage of young people (not older than 30)



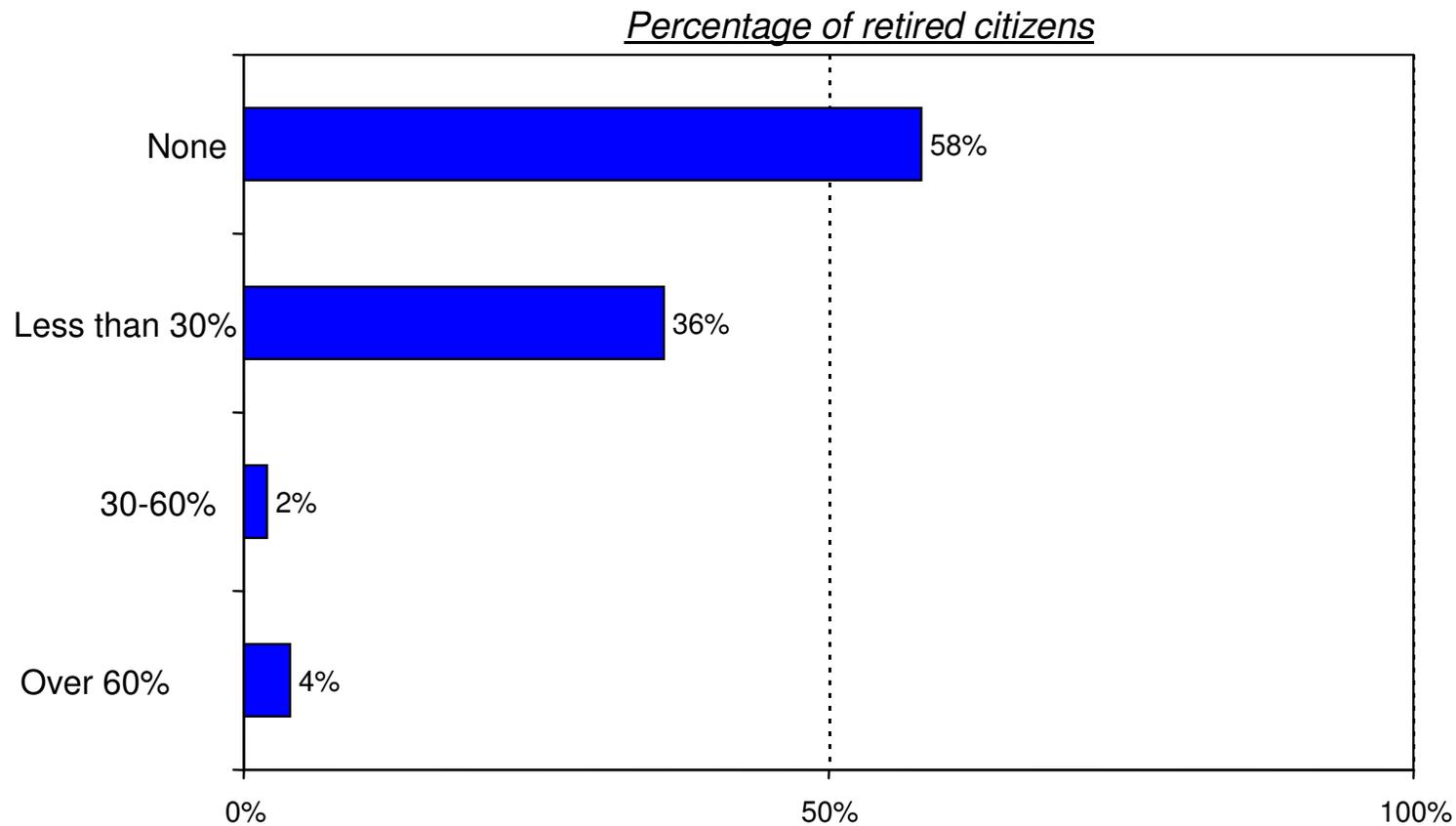
Cooperating volunteer profile – continued

In more than half of the organisations covered by the study, over 60% of the cooperating volunteers are women.



Cooperating volunteer profile - continued

Most organisations do not cooperate with retired citizens. In those organisations that do have senior volunteers they number is below 30% of all voluntary personnel.

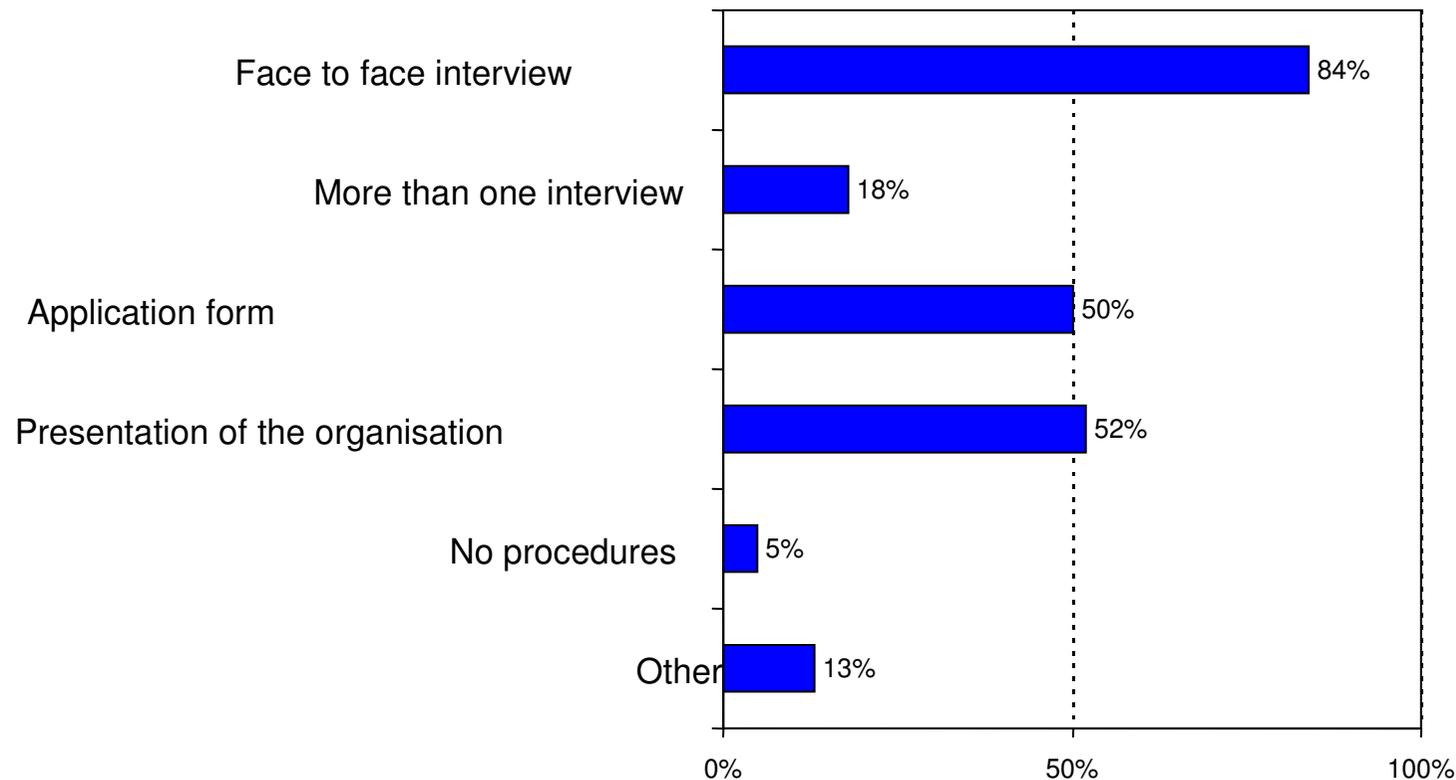


Study results

Managing volunteers

Volunteer selection procedures

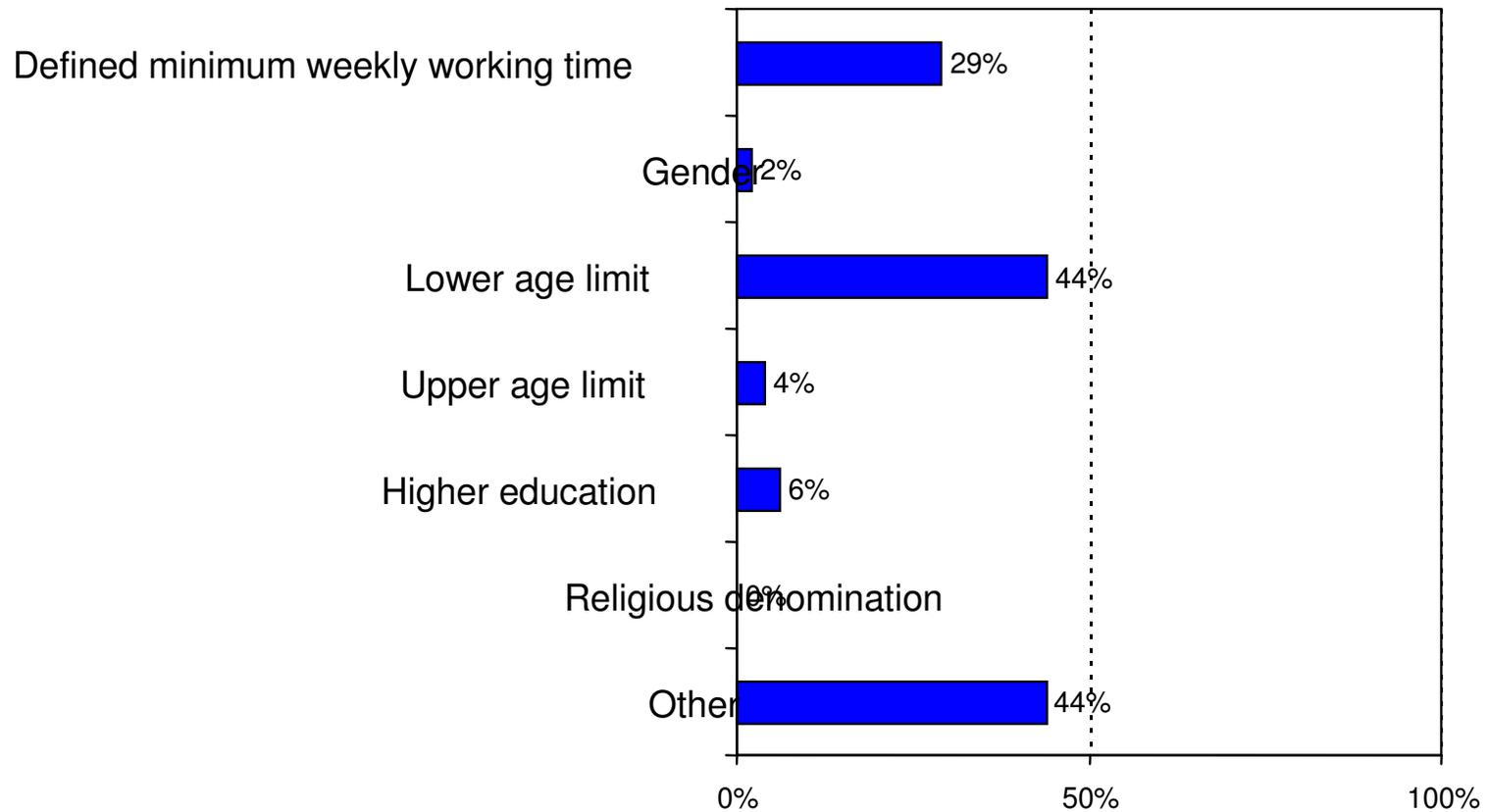
In the volunteer selection process most organisations would interview the candidates to learn about their experiences and expectations. In every second organisation, during the first meeting a representative of the organisation provides some information about the organisation and the volunteer fills in an application form.



Managing volunteers

Criteria that must be met by potential volunteers

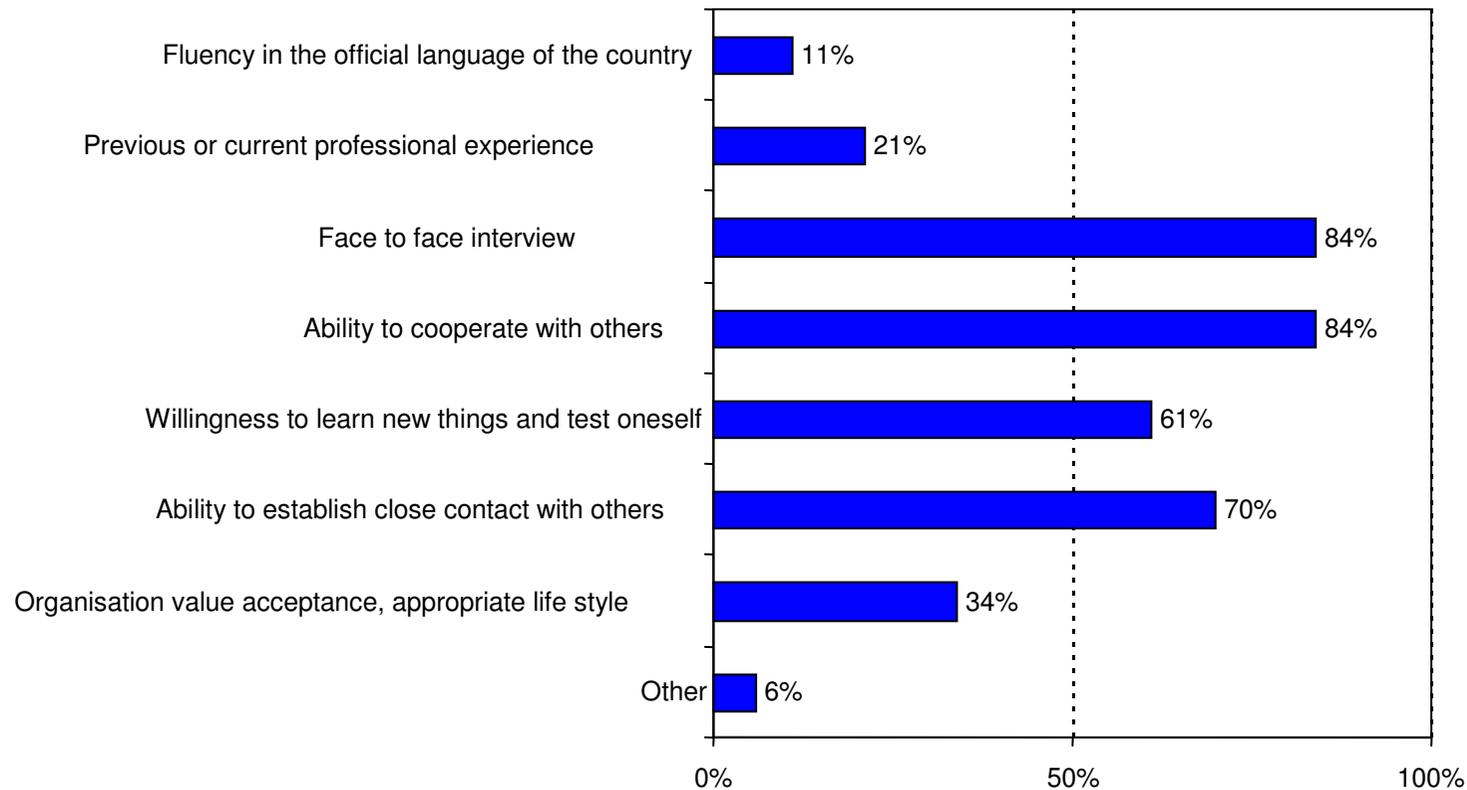
Usually candidates for volunteers must be at least 18 years old and have skills associated with the profile of the organisation. Some organisations require also some minimum working time in a week.



Managing volunteers

Highly appreciated skills of volunteers

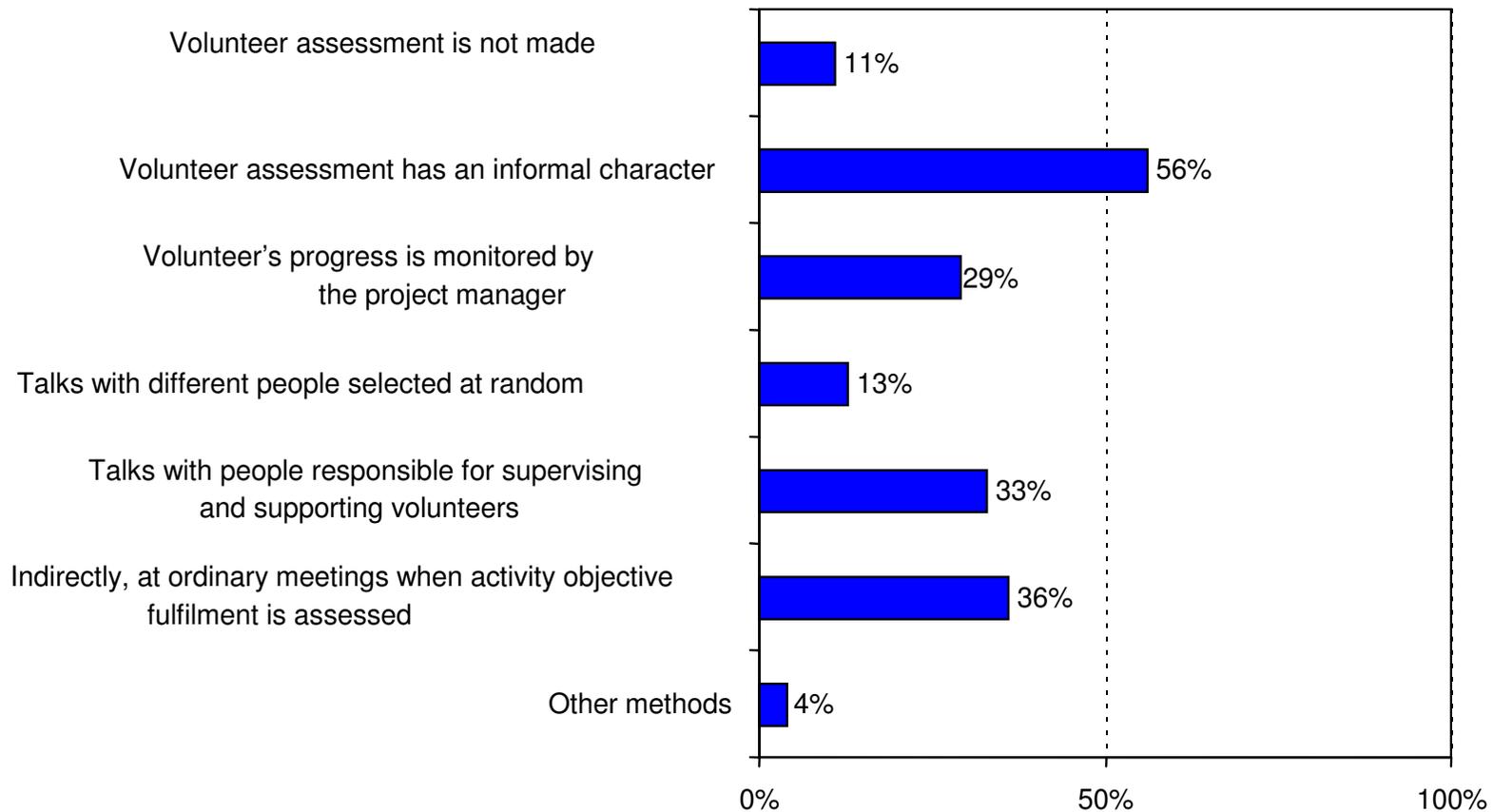
During volunteer selection, greatly appreciated skills include the ability to cooperate with other people and establish close contact with them. Often, it is examined whether the potential volunteer is eager to learn new things and test oneself. Less often, acceptance of the organisational values, appropriate life style and previous or current professional experience are taken into account.



Managing volunteers

Volunteer assessment

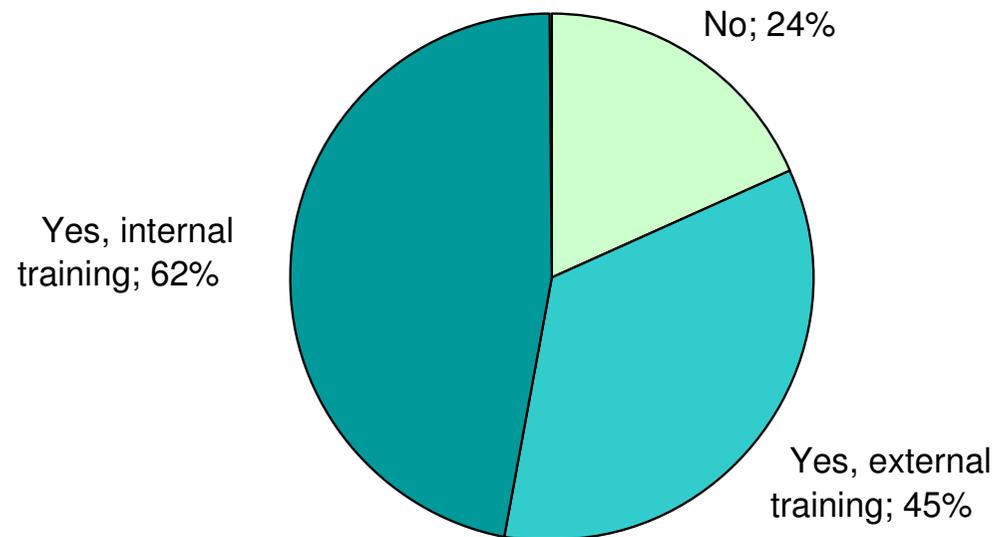
In more than half of the interviewed organisations volunteer assessment has an informal character and no specific analytical tools are applied in its course.



Training for volunteers

Training for volunteers in organisations during the last two years

The majority of the organisations provided training for their volunteers during the last two years. Most often it was internal training.



Training for volunteers

Volunteer training subjects during the last two years

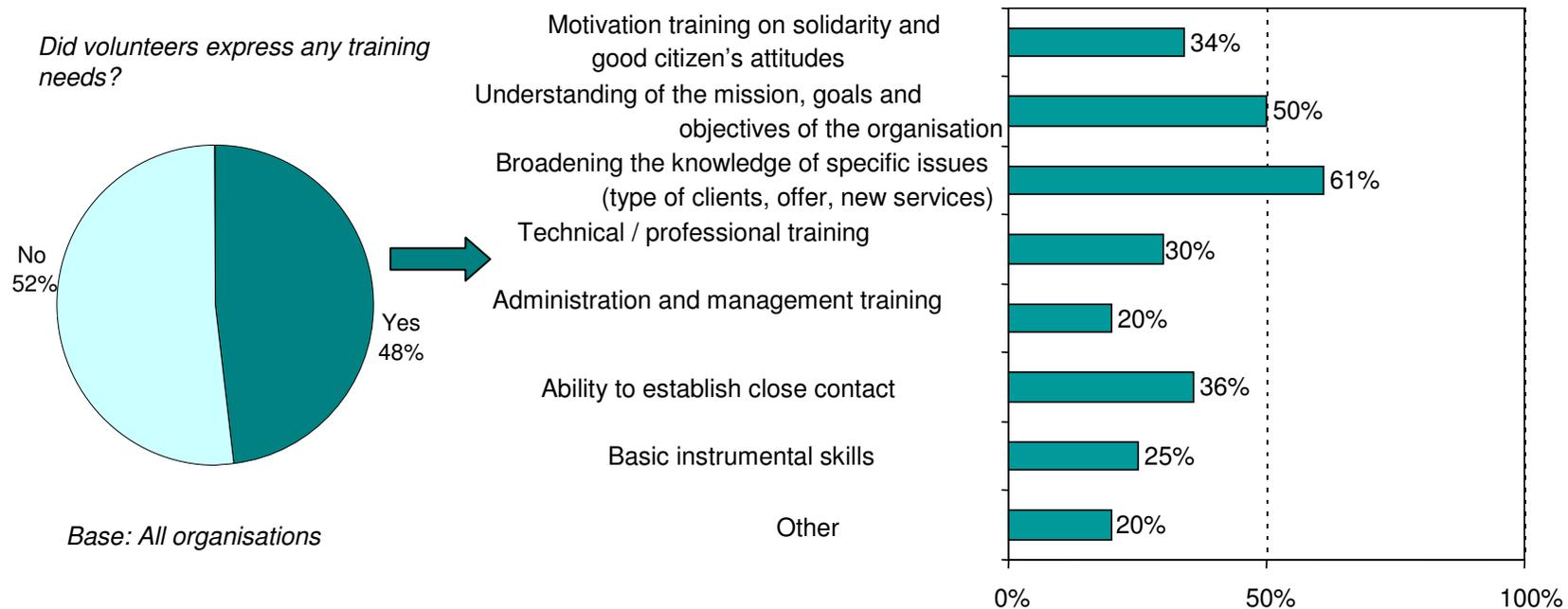
Most often, the training provided to volunteers was supposed to broaden their knowledge of the clients, new services offered by the organisation or its mission, goals and objectives.



Training for volunteers

Training needs expressed by volunteers

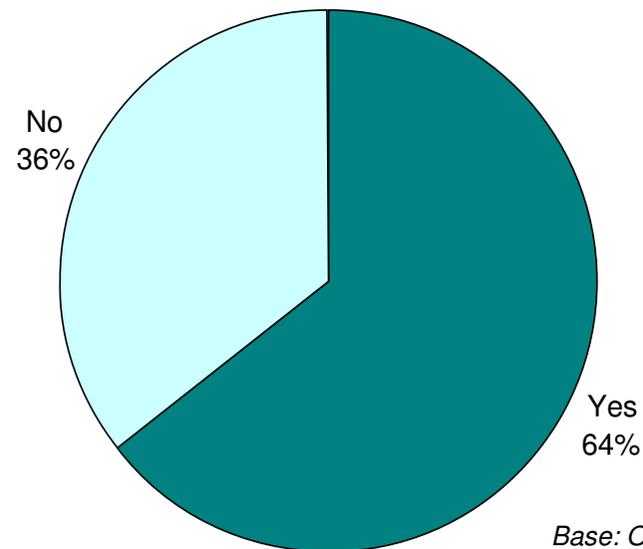
In nearly half of the organisations, volunteers expressed their training needs. Most often they wanted to take part in specialist training on particular issues associated with their work and learn to use specific operational or methodological tools (mediation and research techniques, planning and learning process evaluation).



Training for volunteers

Does participation in training lead to obtaining generally recognised qualifications?

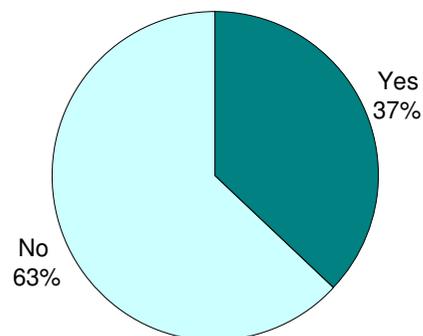
Most organisations that provided some training during the last two years believe that participation in the training lead to obtaining generally recognised qualifications.



Training for volunteers

Issuance of certificates confirming volunteer's qualifications

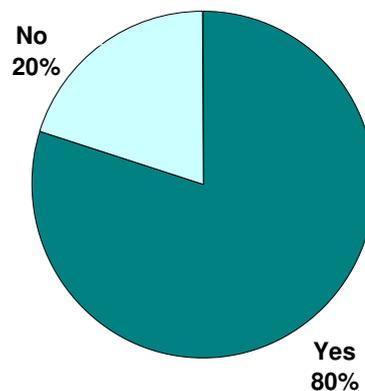
Most organisations included in the study does not issue certificates of the skills acquired during the training.



Base: All organisations

Certificate verification

In the large majority of the organisations that issue certificates the documents are verified internally.

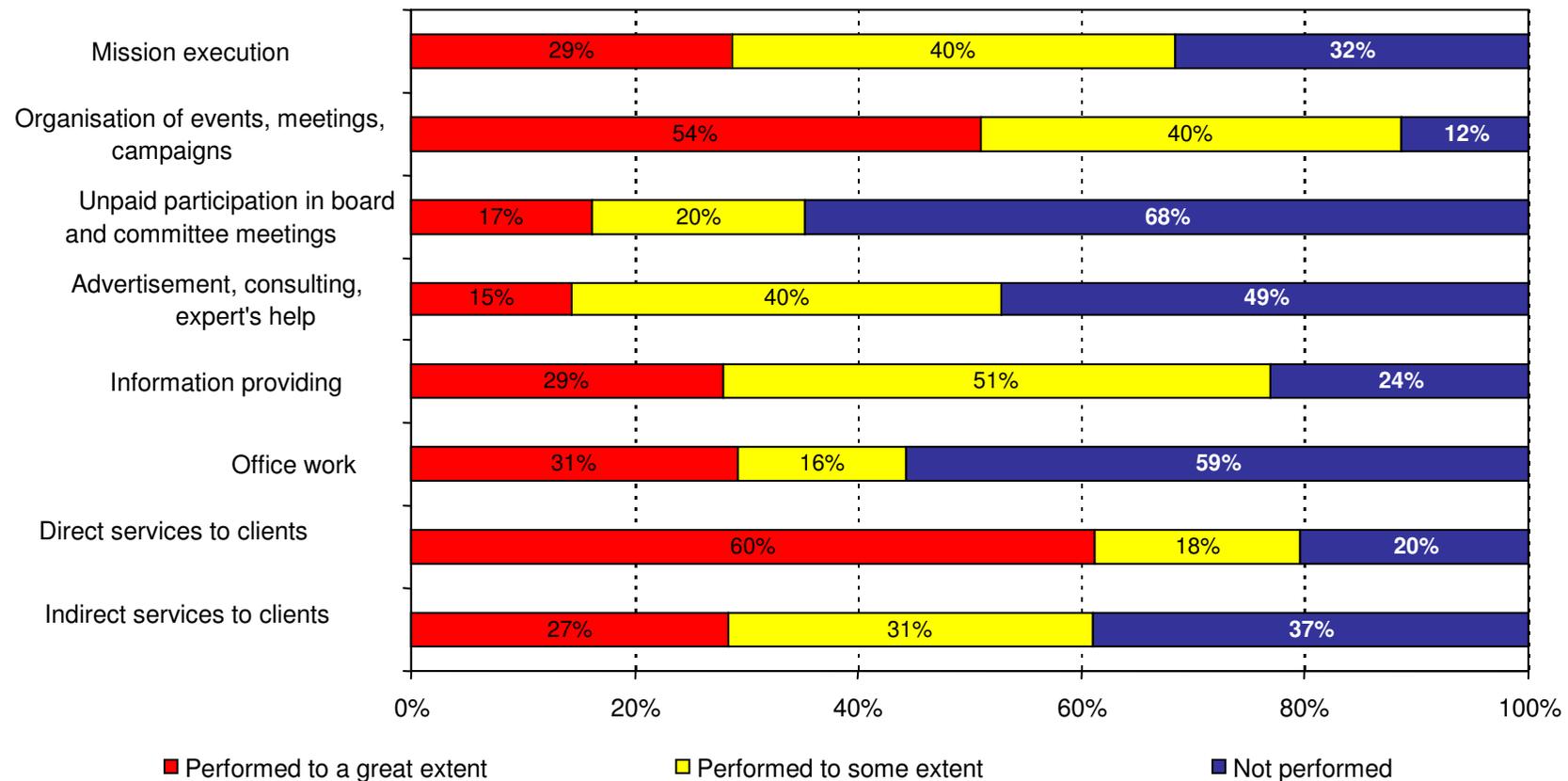


Base: Organisations that issue certificates n=20

Volunteer's opinions

Activities performed by volunteers in organisations

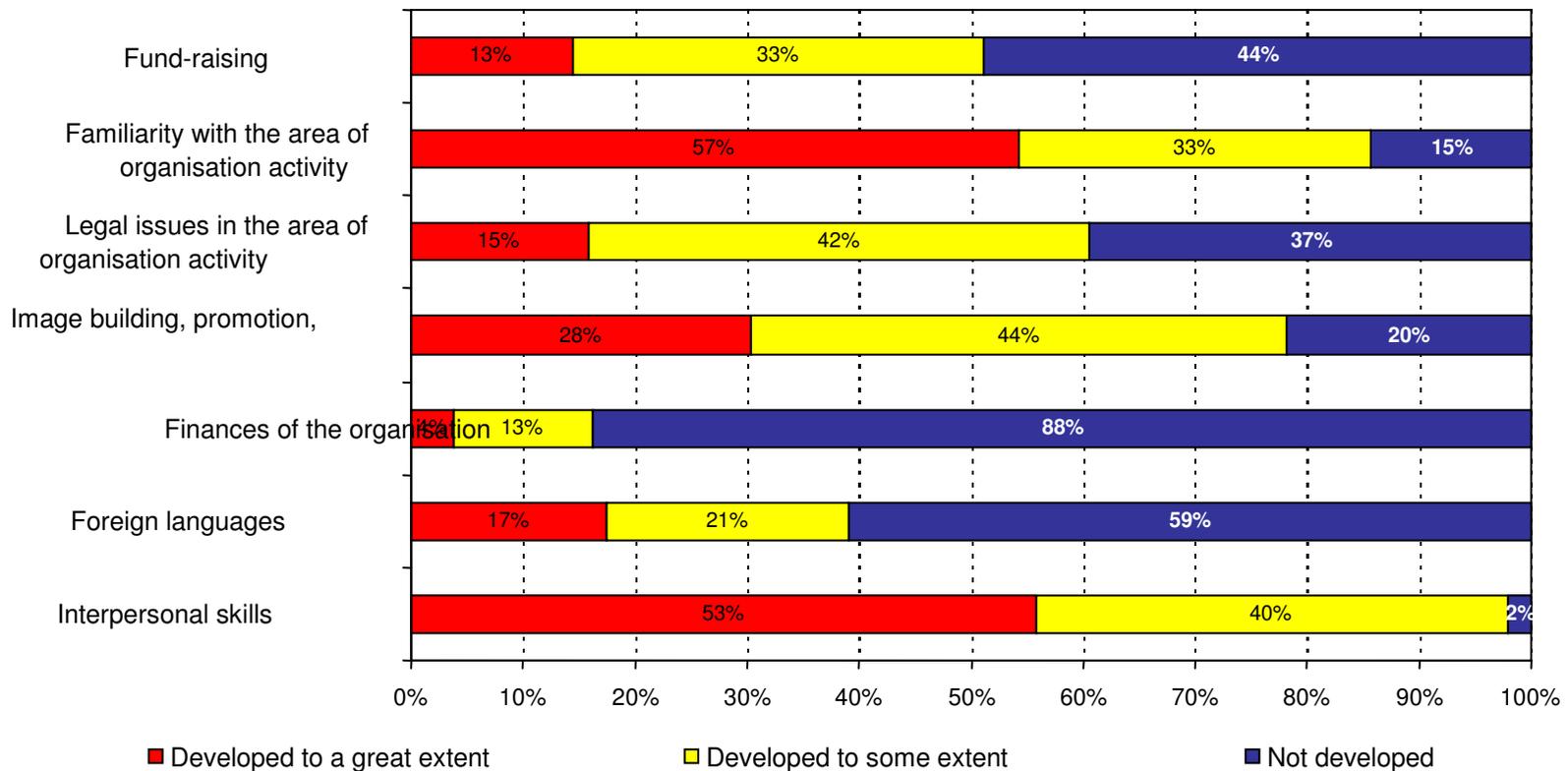
In the organisations covered by the study, volunteers would most often organise events, meetings and campaigns; directly offer services to clients (e.g. medical care, therapy, nursing); provide information and execute the mission of the organisation. Relatively less often they work in the management and advisory boards and committees.



Volunteer's opinions

Skills developed by volunteers in organisations

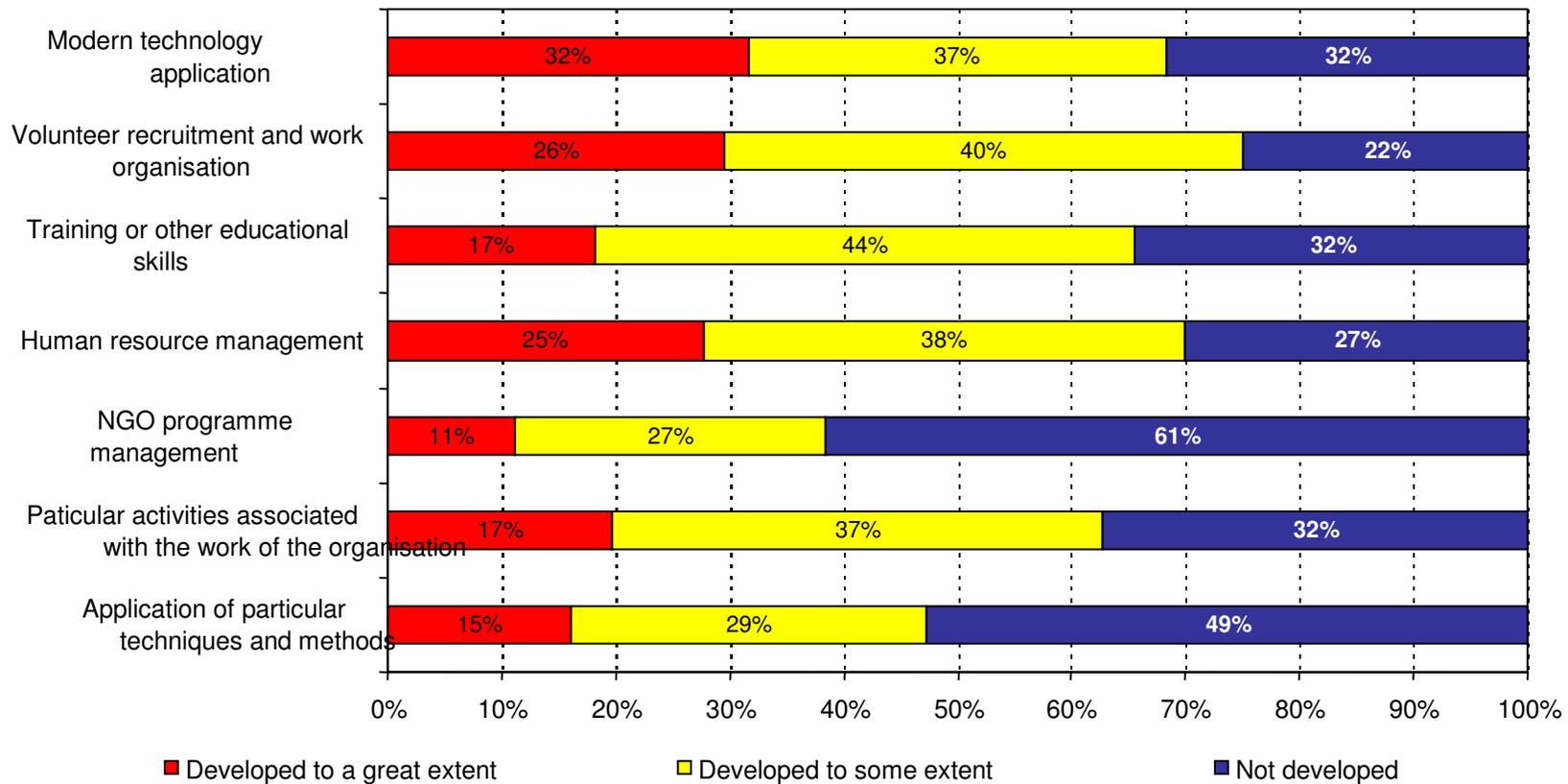
According to volunteers, their work in the organisations helps them, above all, develop interpersonal skills, become familiar with the area in which the organisation operates and learn to build organisation's image.



Volunteer's opinions

Skills developed by volunteers in organisations

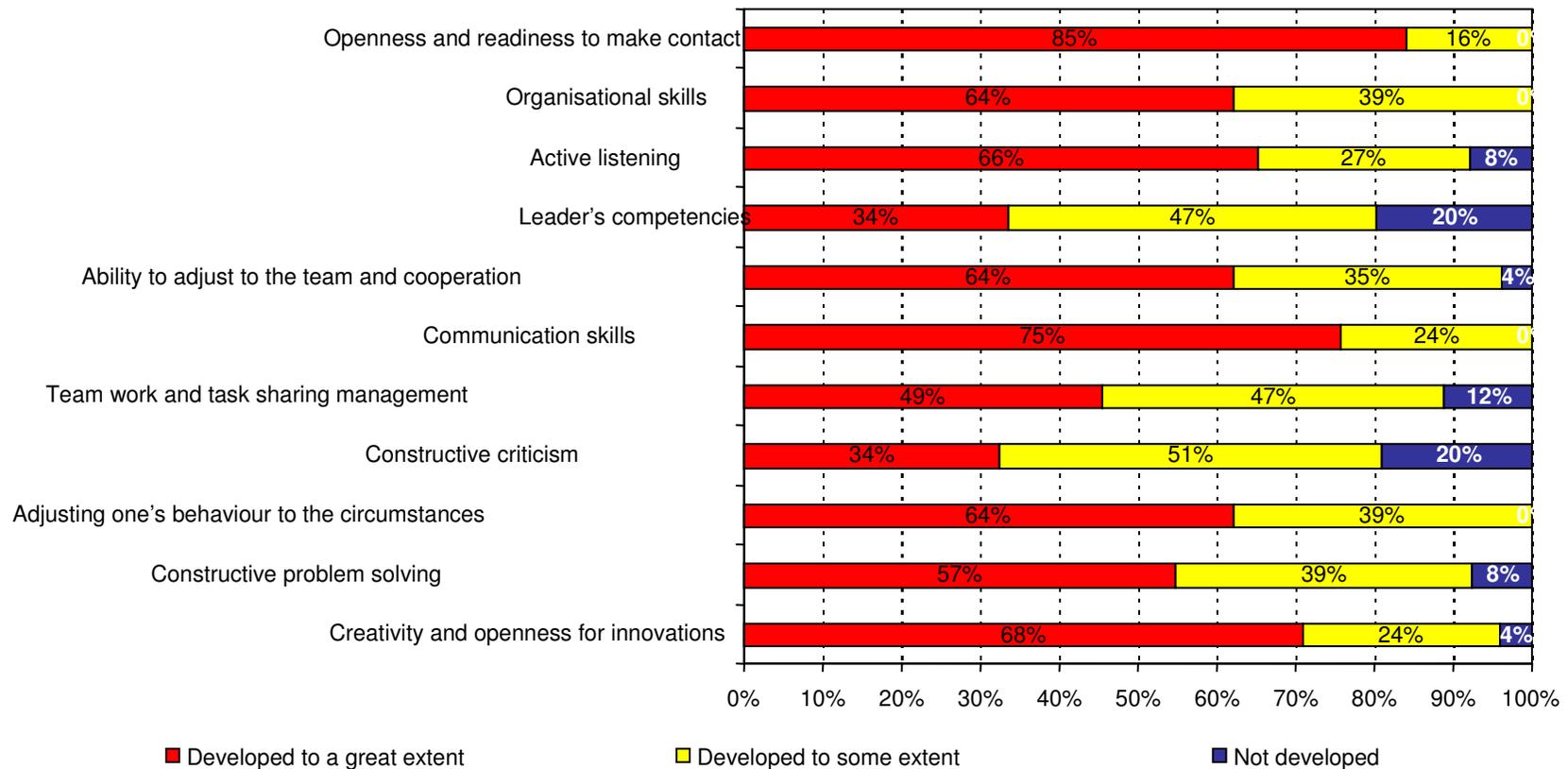
Volunteers think that to a smaller degree they can develop the skills associated with accounting, finance management; NGO programme management as well as foreign languages.



Volunteer's opinions

Talents, competencies and qualifications developed by volunteers in organisations

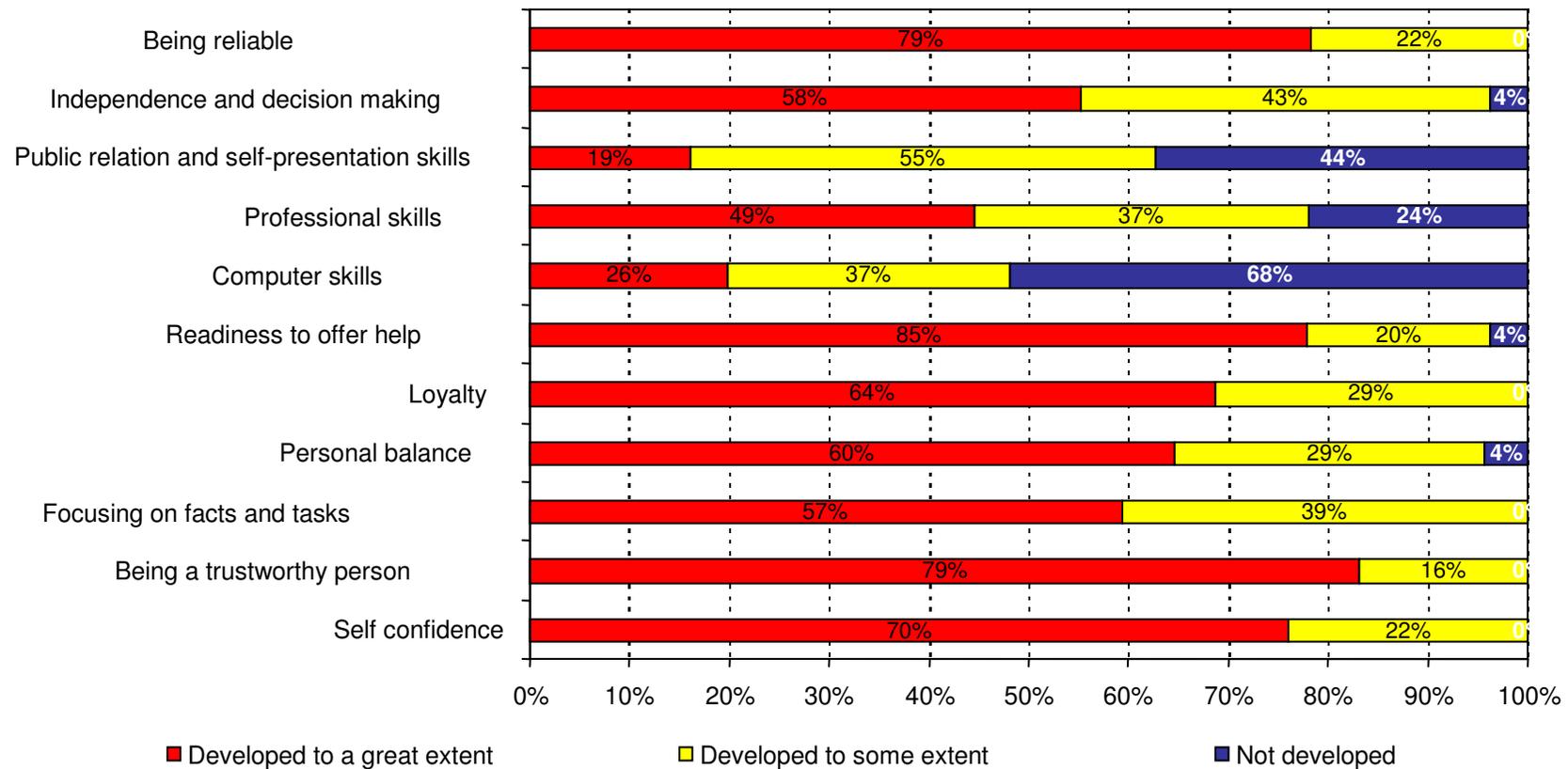
According to volunteers, they can develop a great majority of the talents and competences listed in the questionnaire. They express very good opinions on the ability to develop openness and readiness to make new contacts as well as becoming a self-assured, trustworthy and reliable person. They also believe that by working in the organisation they develop the skills needed to help others as well as master their organisational and communication skills; the ability to adjust their behaviour to the circumstances and become more loyal.



Volunteer's opinions

Talents, competencies and qualifications developed by volunteers in organisations

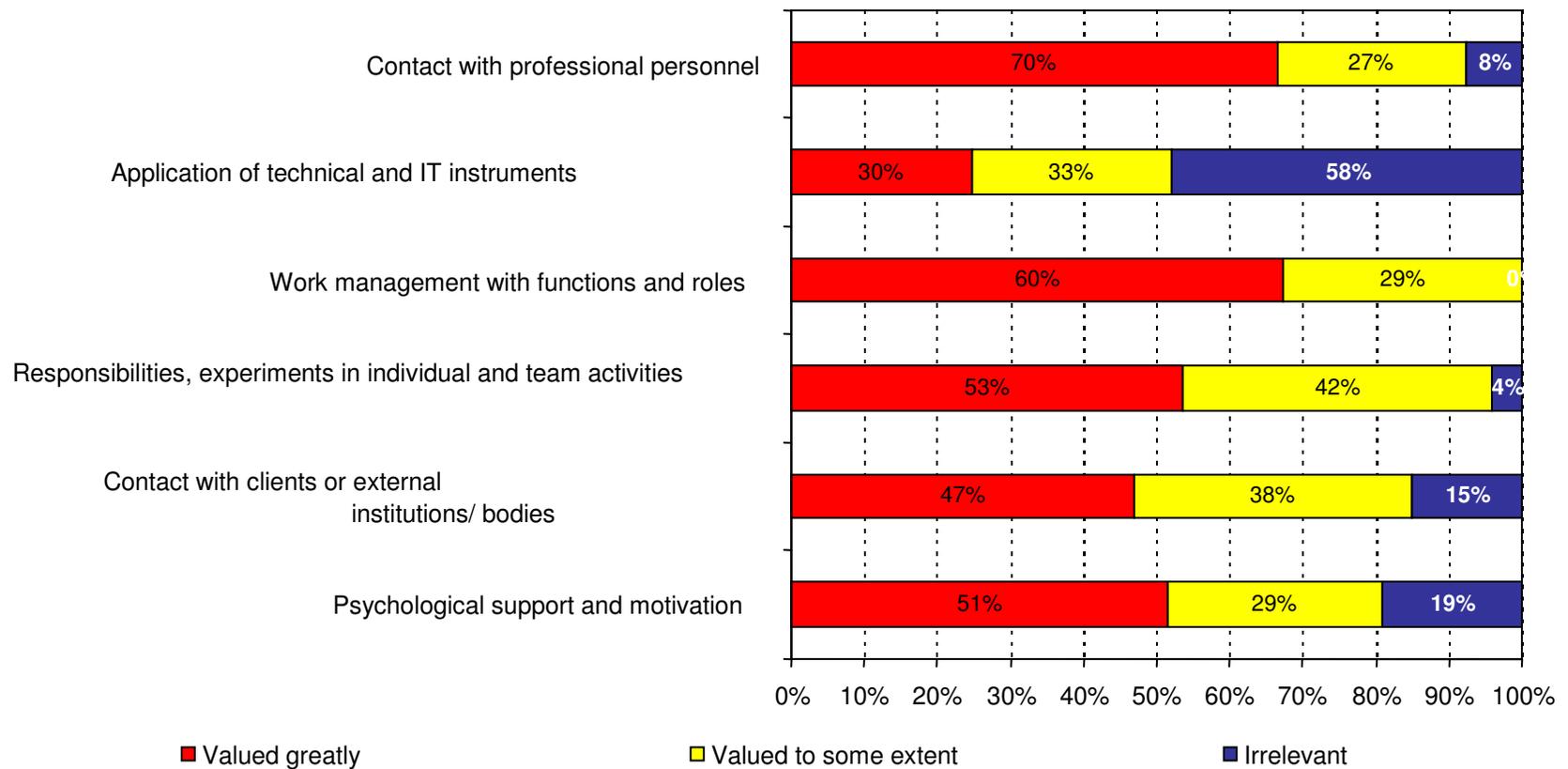
According to the volunteers, while working in NGOs, to a smaller extent they can develop their computer, self-presentation and public relation skills.



Volunteer's opinions

Most valuable experiences obtained by volunteers

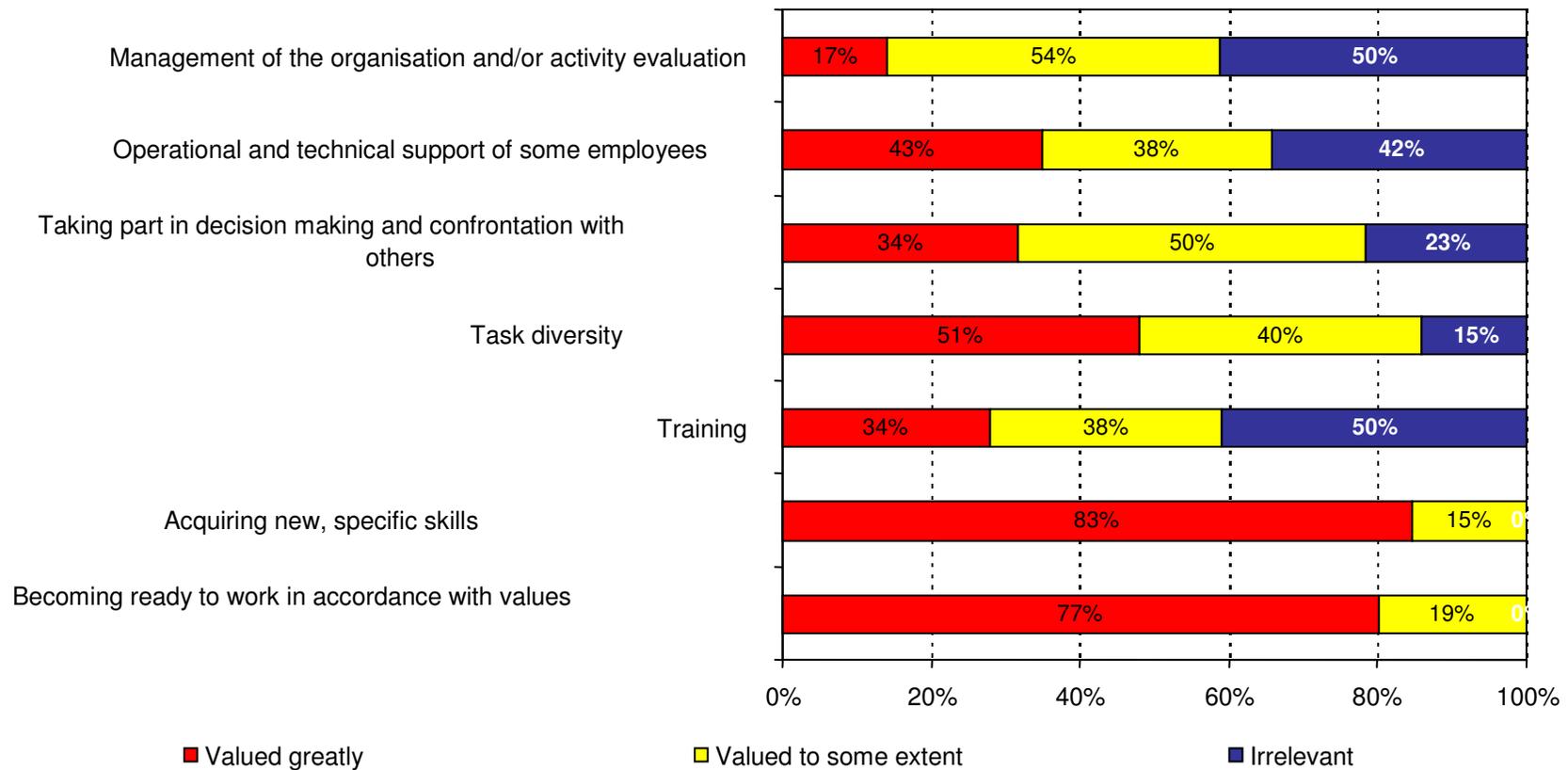
Asked about the most precious experiences obtained while working in the organisations, the volunteers talk about acquiring new, specific skills, becoming ready to operate in line with the values of the organisation, managing the tasks in accordance with the functions and roles as well as contact with professional personnel.



Volunteer's opinions

Most valuable experiences obtained by volunteers

According to volunteers, relatively less relevant is their experience associated with organisation management, activity evaluation, training participation and ability to use technical and IT instruments.

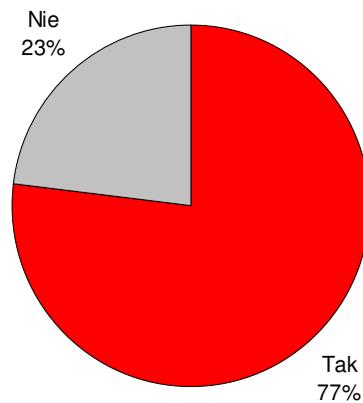


Volunteer's opinions

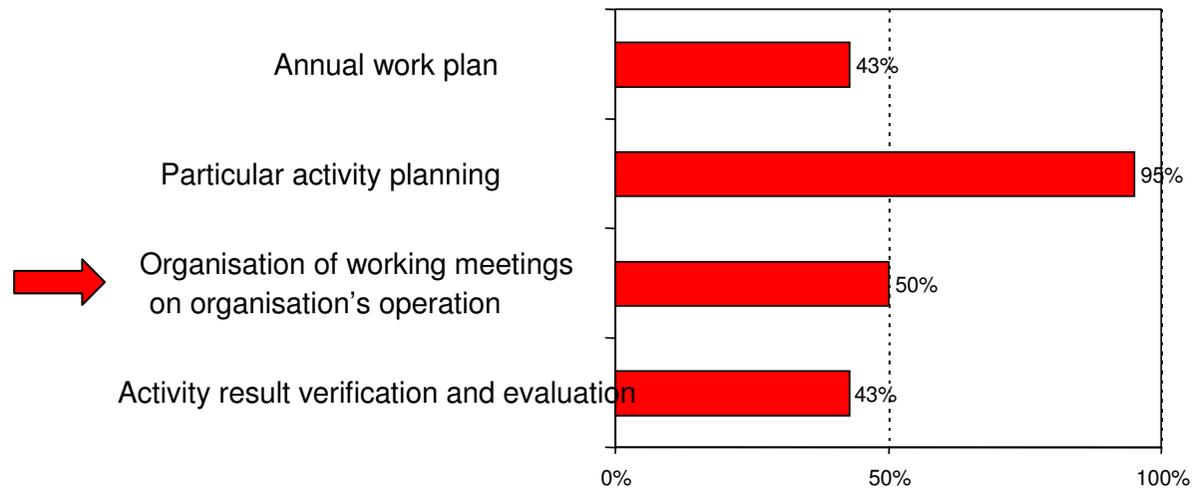
Volunteers' participation in decision making processes

In the majority of the organisations covered by the study, the volunteers can take part in decision making processes. Most often the decisions are associated with particular activity planning.

Do volunteers participate in any decision making process?



Decision making processes participated by volunteers

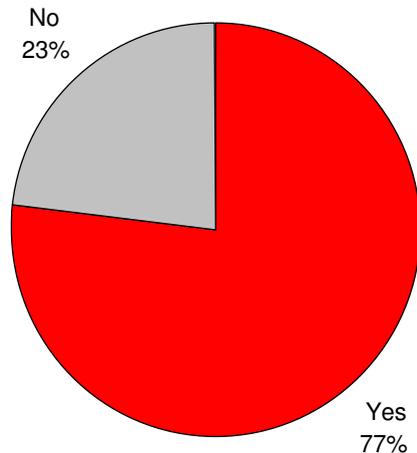


Assessment of voluntary experience

Professional application of informal competencies acquired by the volunteer in the organisation

Representatives of the organisations included in the study say that they know volunteers who use the competencies acquired in the organisation in their professional work. Most often volunteers use the experience of working with children as well as interpersonal skills.

Do you know volunteers who use in their professional work some informal competencies acquired in your organisation?



Most often mentioned competencies acquired in the organisation and used in professional work

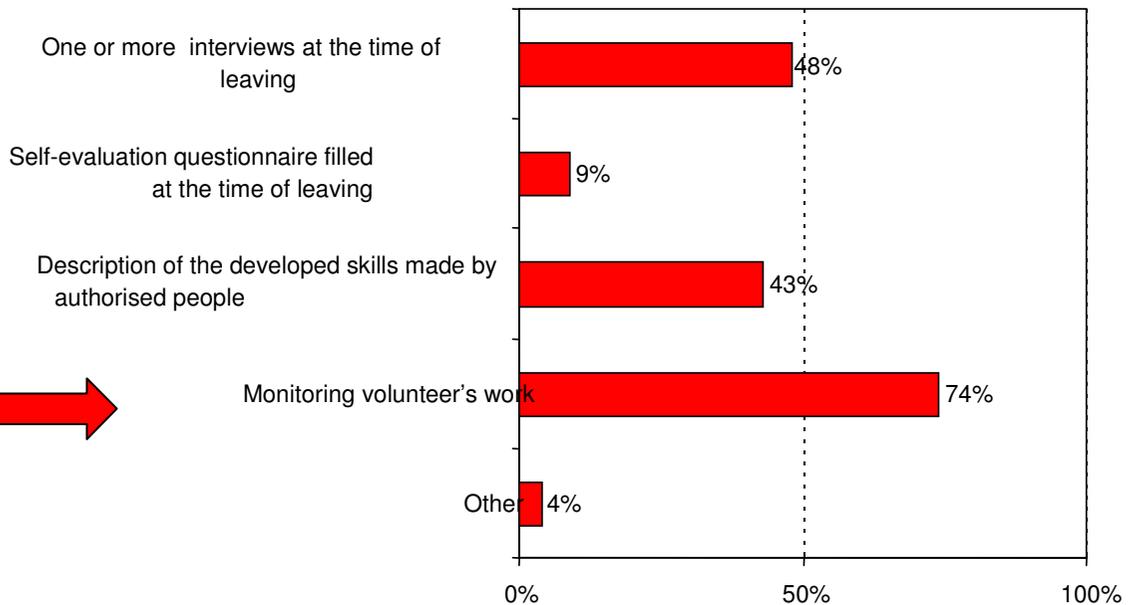
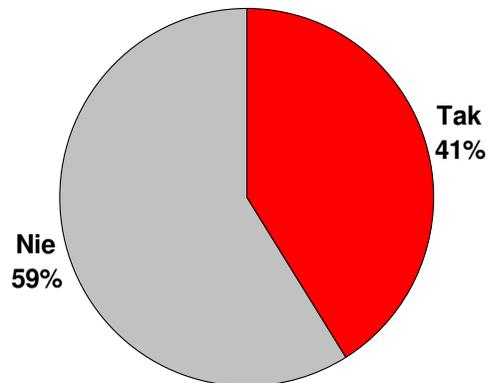
- Working with children
- Interpersonal skills
- Specific therapeutic methods
- Readiness to work in a team, listening to the leader

Assessment of voluntary experience

Procedures applied to assess the skills developed by the volunteer who leaves the organisation

In more than half of the organisations, no procedures are applied to assess the skills developed by the volunteer who leaves the organisation. Those organisations that do have such procedures most often monitor volunteers during their work.

Does the organisation apply some procedures to assess the skills developed by the volunteer who leaves the organisation?

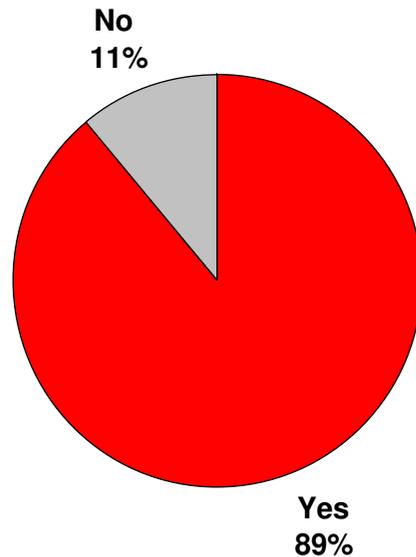


Assessment of voluntary experience

Documents certifying volunteer's experience

The great majority of the organisations interviewed issue documents certifying volunteer's involvement with the organisation. Most often it is a certificate of work and the opinion on performance of work.

Does the organisation issue any work certificates to volunteers?



Documents issued most often to volunteers who leave the organisation

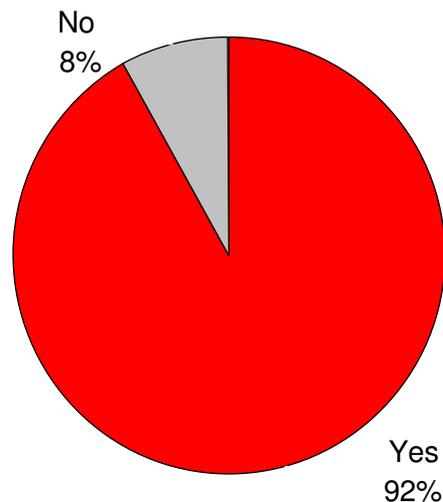
- 
- certificate of voluntary work
 - recommendations

Assessment of voluntary experience

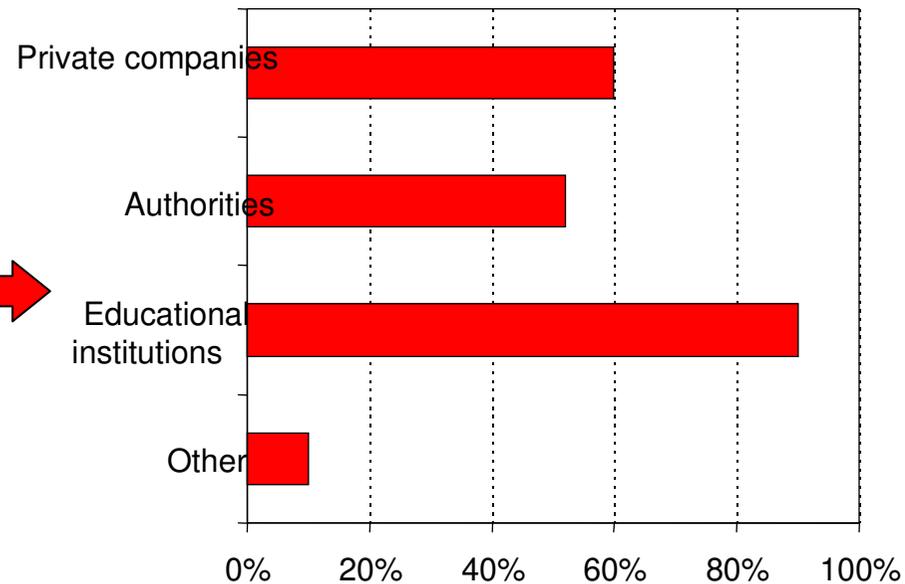
Documents certifying volunteer's experience

Documents certifying volunteer's experience are recognised also by other entities. Among those that recognise such certificates, most often educational institutions and private companies are mentioned.

Are such documents recognised also by other entities?



Who recognises the documents certifying voluntary work?

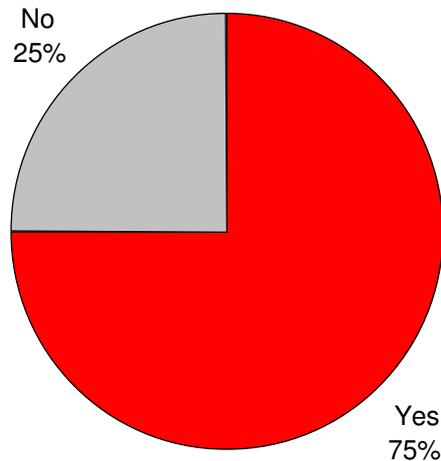


Assessment of voluntary experience

Evaluation of the method proposed in the AVE project

Representatives of $\frac{3}{4}$ of the organisations covered by the study believe that the voluntary experience assessment method may be useful also for other organisations. The great majority of the organisations would be interested in the tools and method proposed in the AVE project.

Could the voluntary experience assessment method be useful also for other organisations?



Would you be interested in the tools (portfolio) and method (manual) proposed in the AVE project?

