



Volunteering during COVID-19: attitudes and behaviours

The Tasmania Project

Summary of findings from the 5th and 6th general surveys (September/October 2021, February/March 2022)

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Key findings

Volunteering rate. In the first year of the pandemic, the volunteering rate declined by about 10% percentage points compared to the year before the pandemic and slightly increased in the second year of the pandemic.

Volunteer profiles. We identified six different volunteer profiles – the most common ones were *long-term volunteer* (1 in 3 of all respondents) and *never volunteer in Tasmania* (about 30%). Almost half of the sample had volunteered since the start of the pandemic.

COVID affected changes. About one third of the sample were volunteering at the start of the pandemic. Of these, more than 45% reported one or more changes to their volunteering directly affected by the pandemic (such as sporadic volunteering).

Future volunteering. Of all respondents who were not volunteering around the time they participated in the survey, about one half would consider and almost 2 in 5 might consider volunteering in the future.

Sector of volunteering. The largest proportion of volunteers volunteered in welfare/community sector (about 1 in 4 of them) and sport and physical recreation area (about 1 in 5 of them).

Satisfaction with colleagues. Survey participants reported high levels of satisfaction with different people in the organisation they volunteered for. On average, similar levels were reported for satisfaction with other volunteers, paid staff, and their supervisors.

Attitudes, main role. Most volunteers (about 3 in 4) enjoyed meaningful relationships through volunteering. The majority (about two-thirds) spent most of their volunteering time on meaningful tasks, and felt a strong sense of belonging to their volunteer organisation (almost 2 in 3 volunteers).

Attitudes, general. Respondents who never volunteered, or never volunteered in Tasmania specifically, reported very positive attitudes towards volunteering in general.

Methodology

Data for The Tasmania Project Survey 5 (TTP5) were collected between 24 September and 3 October 2021 and data for The Tasmania Project Reopening Survey (TTP6) were collected between 10 February and 1 March 2022, both using an online survey questionnaire and a volunteer survey sample.

Email invitations with a link to the survey were sent to between about 4,000 (TTP5) and 4,500 (TTP6) Tasmanians who had registered to be involved in The Tasmania Project. Invitations to the survey were also shared on social media and by a range of community, government and business contacts. A total of 1,106 valid questionnaire responses were collected in TTP5 and there were a total of 2,043 questionnaire completions in TTP6.

Survey respondents in both TTP5 and TTP6 were more likely to be female, 45 years and older, more educated, and those born in Australia. After weighting by sex, age, education and country of birth, the distributions more closely resembled the Australian Census 2016 benchmarks for the Tasmanian population. Weighting improved the socio-demographic representation and thus the validity of the samples.

The weighted socio-demographic distributions, including for three weighting variables (i.e. sex, age and education), are presented in Table 1. About 45% of respondents in both surveys were from Greater Hobart, followed by West and North West region with 26.9% (TTP5) and 24.8% (TTP6). A significant proportion of respondents were living in households consisting of couples without children (between 36.4% in TTP6 and 41.8% in TTP5), and the largest proportions of respondents were from households with a total annual income of less than sixty thousand dollars (TTP5: 40.4%, TTP6: 47.9%). This means that the proportion of low-income households is overestimated despite of applying weights.

Variable	TTP5, weighted (n=1,106)		TTP6, weighted (n=2,043)	
	n	%	n	%
Gender				
Female	541	49.2	968	49.1
Male	537	48.8	976	48.7
Prefer not to say/self describe	21	2.0	43	2.2
Age				
18-24 years	75	6.8	282	14.5
25-44 years	344	31.4	451	23.2
45-64 years	403	36.8	688	35.4
65+ years	274	25.0	523	26.9
Education				
No degree	888	80.7	1592	80.2
Bachelor's degree or more	213	19.3	392	19.8
Region (SA4)				
Greater Hobart	499	45.4	899	45.8
Launceston and North East	232	21.2	428	21.8
South East	72	6.5	150	7.6
West and North West	295	26.9	486	24.8
Household composition				
Couple without children	460	41.8	719	36.4
Parents with pre- or school-aged children	187	17.0	267	13.5
Parent/s with adult children	135	12.2	335	16.9
One-person household	182	16.6	372	18.8
Other household composition	137	12.4	283	14.3
Household income (annual)				
<\$60,000	387	40.3	914	47.9
\$60,000 - <\$100,000	263	27.4	522	27.3
\$100,000+	311	32.3	473	24.8

Table 1: TTP5 and TTP6 respondents by socio-demographic characteristics (after weighting)

Results

This report presents Tasmanian evidence on volunteering rates over time, different volunteer profiles, changes in volunteering directly affected and those not affected by COVID-19, and intentions to volunteer in the future (Reopening Survey/TTP6). It also presents the results on the sector of volunteering and satisfaction with volunteering, attitudes towards the main volunteering role and attitudes towards volunteering in general (TTP5).

Volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic

In the first part of the report, we analyse The Tasmania Project survey 6 (TTP6) data to show how the COVID-19 pandemic affected Tasmanian volunteers and their volunteering, as well as their intention to volunteer in the future.

Volunteering before and during the pandemic

In the TTP6 survey, we first asked Tasmanians about their volunteering patterns, namely the time periods during which they volunteered to support an organisation, club or committee:

- (1) more than 1 year before the pandemic (before March 2019),
- (2) the year before the pandemic (March 2019-February 2020),
- (3) 1st year of the pandemic (March 2020-February 2021),
- (4) 2nd year of the pandemic (March 2021-February 2022),
- (5) in the previous 4 weeks.

The results show that about 38% of respondents did not volunteer in Tasmania before March 2019, and about 1 in 2 respondents volunteered in the year before the pandemic.

We can observe a negative impact of COVID-19 on volunteering, especially in the 1st year of the pandemic – 41.5% of respondents volunteered, down from 51.1% in the year before the pandemic. This decline does not fully reflect the negative change in the first few months of the pandemic (due to later recovery). In the 2nd year of the pandemic, the proportion of volunteers increased slightly, to 43.5%. Out of 2,043 respondents from the TTP6 survey, 31.1% were volunteering in the 4 weeks before completing the questionnaire.

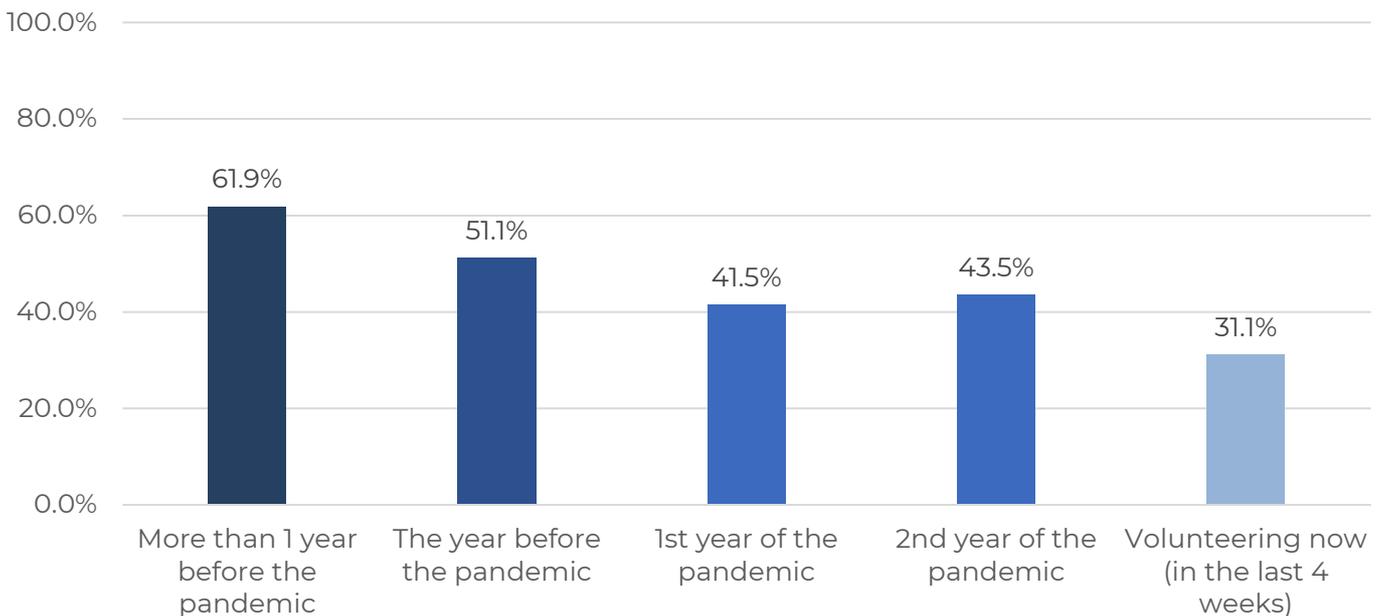


Figure 1: Volunteering rate changes over time (n=2,043 , TTP6)

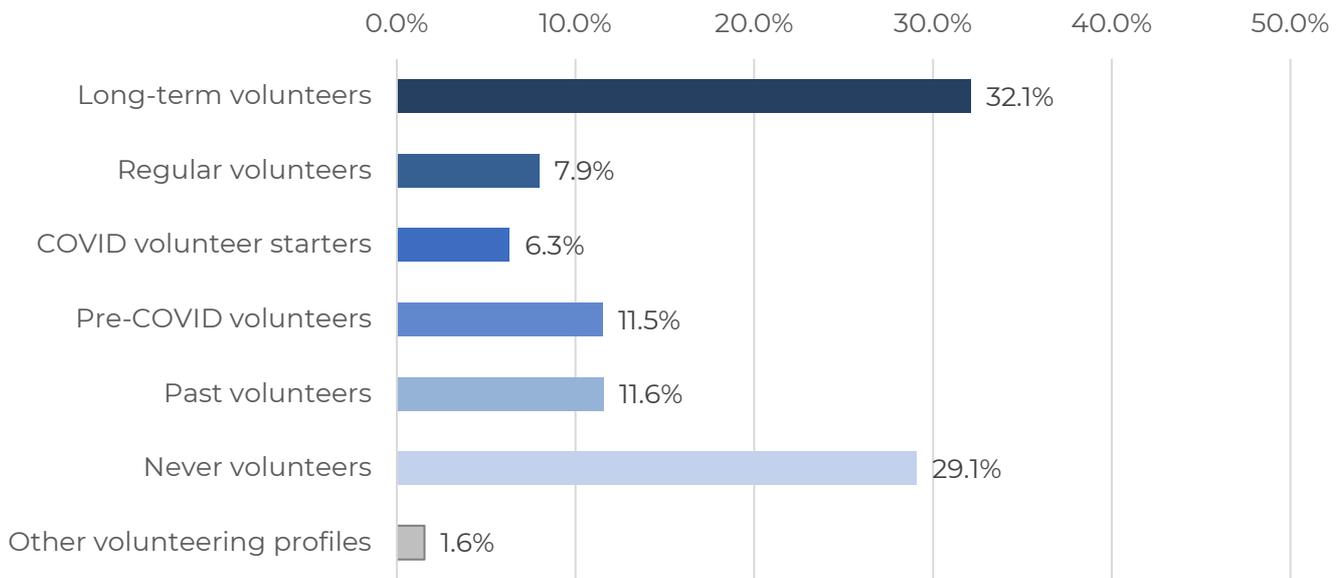


Figure 2: Volunteer profiles based on volunteering trends over time (n=2,043, TTP6)

Volunteer profiles

Based on their volunteering patterns in Tasmania, the TTP6 respondents were classified into six distinctive groups:

- (1) Long-term volunteers (*volunteering in all time periods, see Figure 1*)
- (2) Regular volunteers (*volunteering in all but one of those time periods*)
- (3) COVID volunteer starters (*volunteered for the first time after March 2020*)
- (4) Pre-COVID volunteers (*volunteered in the year before but not after the start of the pandemic*)
- (5) Past volunteers (*volunteered before but never since March 2019*)
- (6) Never volunteers (*never volunteered, at least not in Tasmania*)

The largest proportion of respondents were classified as long-term volunteers (32.1%), followed by never volunteers (29.1%), past volunteers (11.6%), and pre-COVID volunteers (11.5%). There were 1.6% of respondents with a different volunteering pattern and who could not be classified in one of the six groups.

We observed socio-demographic differences between the analysed groups (but not for all of those volunteer profiles):

a) *Never volunteers:* respondents without a university degree were on average 1.4 times more likely to never volunteer than those with a university degree; respondents between 45 and 64 years of age were on average 1.5 times more likely to never volunteer than those 65 years of age and older.

b) *COVID volunteer starters:* male respondents were on average more than twice as likely to start volunteering (for the first time) during COVID-19 pandemic than females; respondents 65 years of age and older were on average more than seven times less likely to start volunteering during COVID-19 pandemic than those younger than 65 years.

c) *Long-term volunteers:* respondents with a university degree were on average 1.4 times more likely to be classified as long-term volunteers than those without a university degree; compared to respondents younger than 45 years, respondents from the 45-64 year age group were on average more than 1.5 times more likely and respondents 65 years of age and older were about 2.5 times more likely to be classified as long-term volunteers.

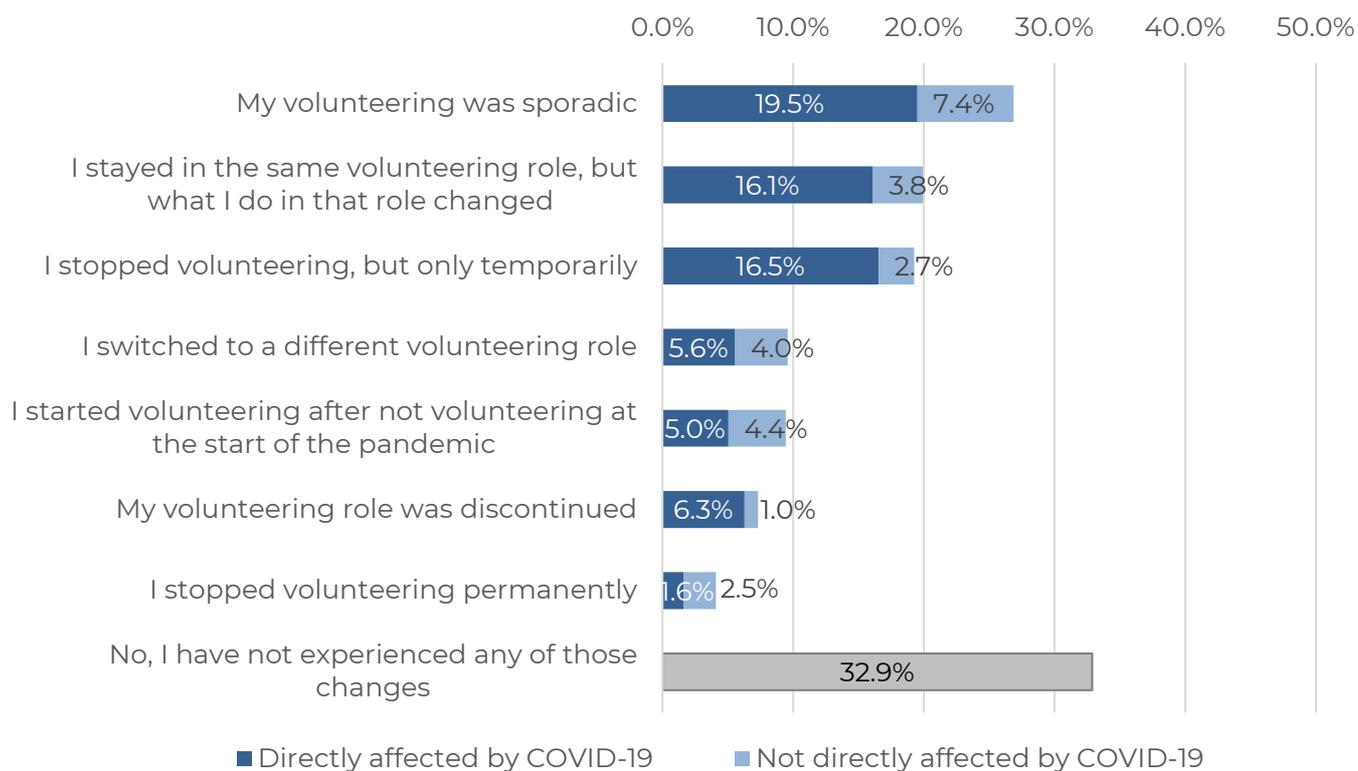


Figure 3: Changes in volunteering during the pandemic, directly affected and unaffected by the pandemic (n=948, i.e. volunteers during the pandemic, TTP6)

Changes in volunteering during the pandemic

TTP6 respondents were asked about any changes to their volunteering since March 2020, and whether those changes were directly affected by the pandemic or not (i.e. would have occurred regardless of the pandemic).

Out of 948 respondents who volunteered at any time during the first two years of the pandemic, 32.9% had not experienced any changes listed (see Figure 3). Out of those we offered as answer options, the largest proportion of respondents selected “My volunteering was sporadic” (26.9%) and “I stayed in the same volunteering role, but what I do in that role changed” (19.9%), and the smallest proportion of our survey participants selected “I stopped volunteering permanently” (4.1%).

We can observe substantial differences in how COVID-19 affected volunteering. Certain changes were almost entirely due to the pandemic, for example “I stopped volunteering, but only temporarily” – 16.5% of respondents reported that this change was directly affected by COVID-19, and 2.7% reported that this change to their volunteering was not affected by the pandemic. On the other hand, changes like switching to a different volunteering role or starting volunteering after not volunteering at the start of the pandemic were less likely to be directly affected by COVID-19. For example, 5.6% of volunteers reported that they switched to a different volunteering role because of the pandemic, and 4.0% of all who volunteered since March 2020 reported that change, but indicated it would have occurred regardless of the pandemic.

	Long-term volunteers	Regular volunteers	COVID volunteer starters
My volunteering role was discontinued	=	↑	↓
I stayed in the same volunteering role, but what I do in that role changed	=	↓	↓↓
I switched to a different volunteering role	=	=	=
My volunteering was sporadic	=	↑	=
I started volunteering after not volunteering at the start of the pandemic	=	↑	↑↑
I stopped volunteering permanently	=	↑	↓
I stopped volunteering, but only temporarily	=	↑	=
No, I have not experienced any of those changes	=	↓↓	↓

↑ - more likely than long-term volunteers; ↓ - less likely than long-term volunteers; = - no differences/ref. group

Table 2: Changes in volunteering during the pandemic, regardless of COVID-19 effect, by volunteer profiles (n=948, i.e. volunteers during pandemic, TTP6)

Changes in volunteering during the pandemic by volunteer profiles

For volunteers during the pandemic, most of whom were long-term and regular volunteers, we looked at the changes to their volunteering. This time, we did not distinguish between COVID-19 affected changes and changes that were not affected by the pandemic. We compared regular volunteers and COVID volunteer starters with long-term volunteers as the reference group.

The results reveal a number of changes that were more or less likely to affect volunteering among less frequent volunteers and those who started volunteering in Tasmania since the start of the pandemic. Compared to long-term volunteers, regular volunteers were more likely to experience the following: (1) a discontinued role, (2) sporadic volunteering, (3) permanently stopped volunteering, and (4) temporarily stopped volunteering. They were also more likely to start volunteering after not volunteering at the start of the pandemic, but they were less likely to stay in the same

volunteering role with changes to what they did in that role. Generally speaking, regular volunteers experienced more changes than any other group.

COVID volunteer starters were a small and specific group since they started at any time between March 2020 and February 2022, i.e. after the start of the pandemic. Since they were newer to volunteering, they were less likely to experience changes to volunteering, except for being more likely to start volunteering, of course. In comparison to long-term volunteers, they were less likely to experience the following: (1) a discontinued role, (2) staying in the same role with changes to what they did in that role, and (3) permanently stopped volunteering. They were equally likely to switch to a different role, volunteer sporadically, and temporarily stopped volunteering.

On the other hand, there were no differences between the analysed groups in switching to a different role.

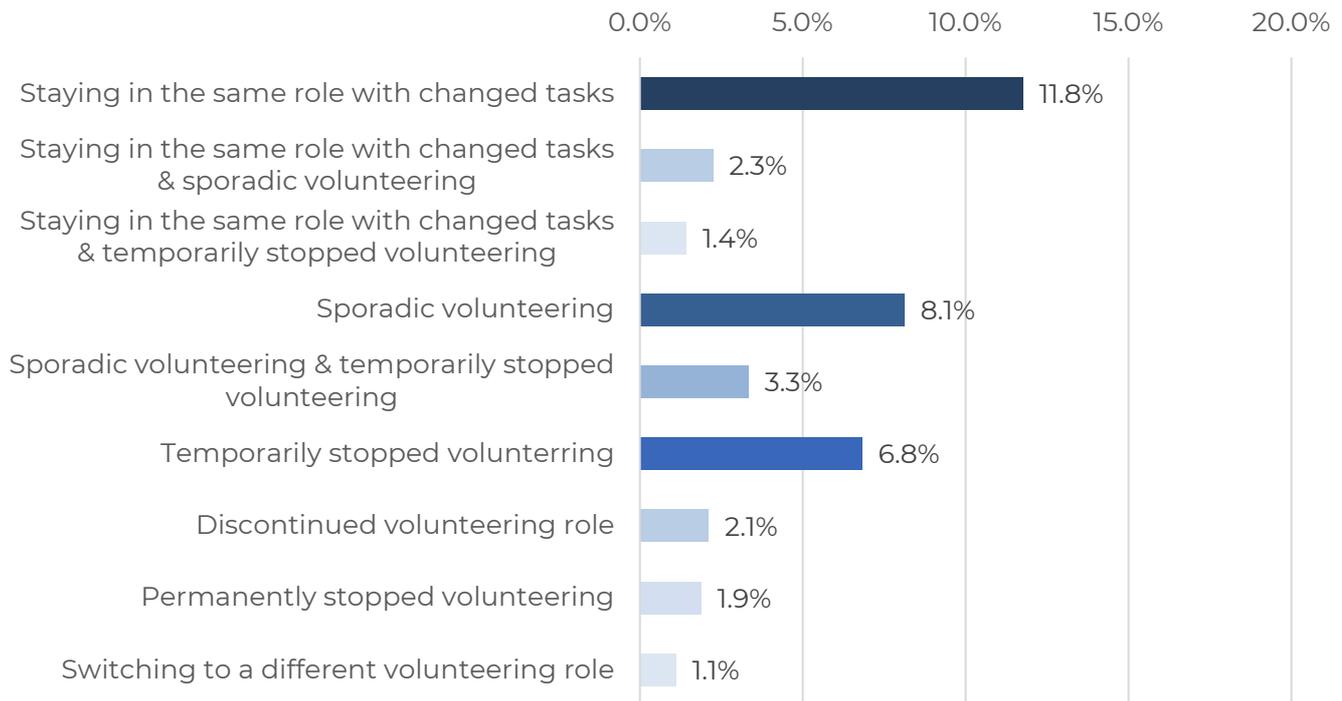


Figure 4: COVID-19 affected changes in volunteering (n=724, i.e. volunteers at the start of the pandemic, TTP6)

Direct effect of COVID-19 on volunteering paths of existing volunteers

We are now presenting the results for those volunteers who volunteered both in the year before the pandemic and at the start of the pandemic, i.e. the existing volunteers in March 2020. In this analysis, we are focusing on the COVID-19 affected changes only.

Out of 754 volunteers at the start of the pandemic who participated in TTP6, 54.7% did not report any changes to volunteering during the pandemic, at least not those directly affected by COVID-19. The remaining 45.3% reported one or more changes to volunteering affected by the pandemic. We were able to identify both individual changes and particular volunteering paths in the first two years of the pandemic.

The most common COVID-19 affected change/combination of changes to the volunteering of predominantly long-term and regular volunteers was staying in the same role

with changed tasks (11.8%). Additionally, 2.3% reported both staying in the same role with changed tasks and sporadic volunteering, and 1.4% reported both staying in the same role with changed tasks and temporarily stopped volunteering.

Sporadic volunteering with no other pandemic affected changes (8.1%) was the second most common volunteering path during COVID-19 for those who were already volunteering at the start of the pandemic. Temporarily stopped volunteering with no other pandemic affected changes (6.8%) was third. Some volunteers experienced both (3.3%).

On the other hand, a discontinued volunteering role (2.1%), permanently stopped volunteering (1.9%), and switching to a different volunteering role (1.1%) were less common COVID-19 affected changes that the existing volunteers at the start of the pandemic experienced.

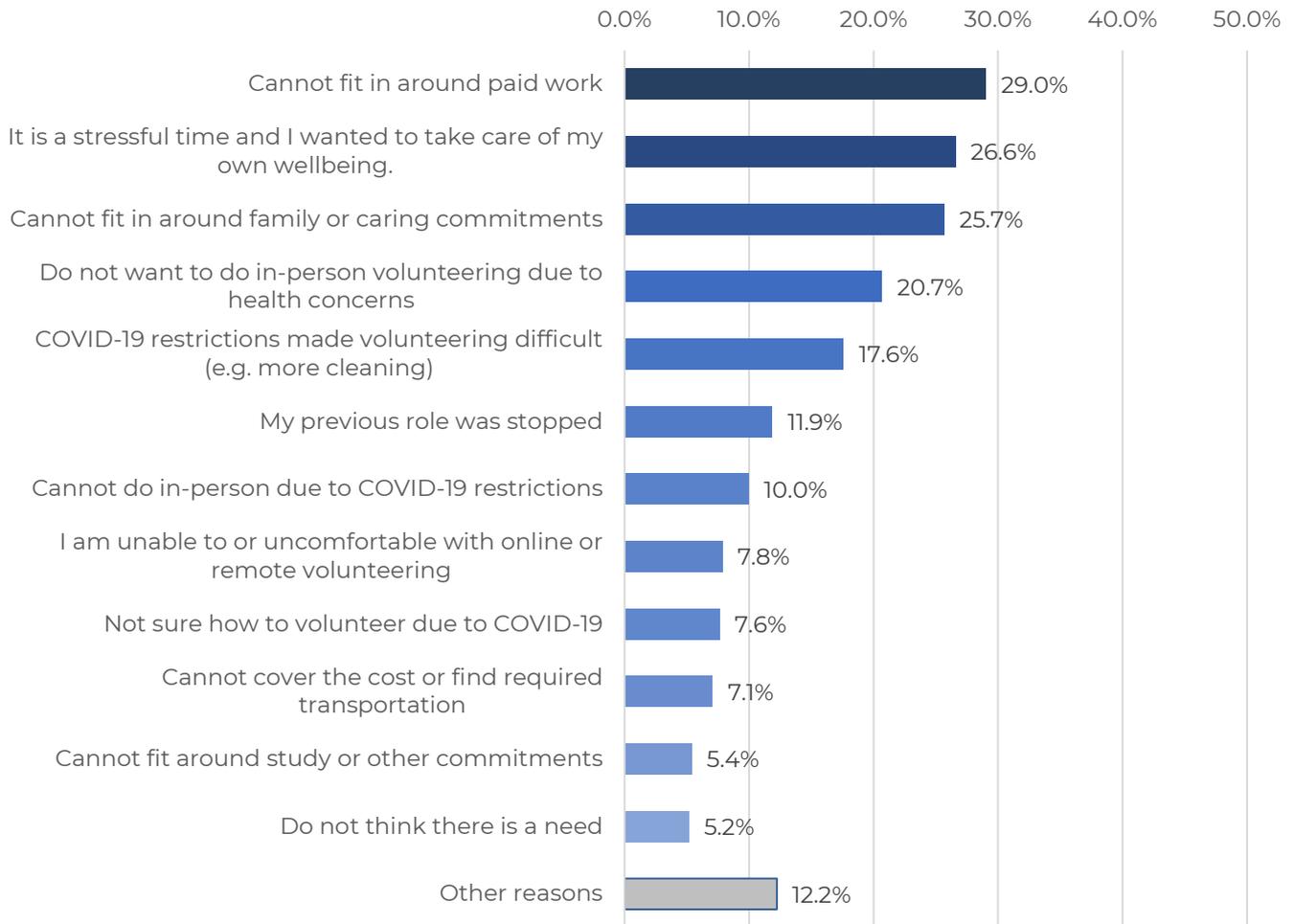


Figure 5: Reasons for not volunteering (n=1,349, i.e. not currently volunteers, TTP6)

Reasons for not volunteering

TTP6 respondents who did not volunteer in the four weeks before completing the questionnaire were asked about their reasons for not volunteering. They were asked to select up to three of the listed options.

The most common reasons for not volunteering were associated with respondents' own commitments, including cannot fit in around: paid work (29.0%), family or caring commitments (25.7%), and study or other commitments (5.4%). A significant proportion of all respondents who were not volunteering at that time was more concerned about their own wellbeing (26.6%) and/or their health (20.7%).

There were also a number of reasons for not volunteering that were somewhat associated with COVID-19:

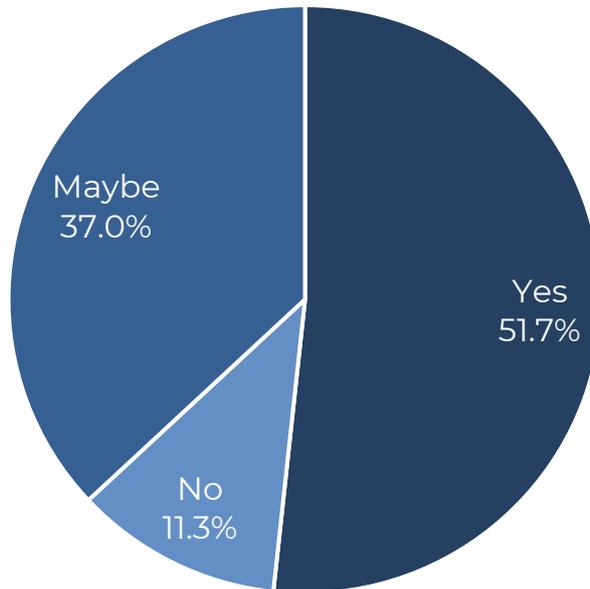
- (1) COVID-19 restrictions made volunteering difficult (17.6%),
- (2) Cannot do in-person due to COVID-19 restrictions (10.0%),
- (3) I am unable to or uncomfortable with online or remote volunteering (7.8%),
- (4) Not sure how to volunteer due to COVID-19 (7.6%).

On the other hand, 11.9% of TTP6 respondents reported that their previous role had been stopped (potentially due to COVID-19), and 7.1% could not cover the cost or find required transportation.

Would you consider volunteering in the future?

The main reasons for currently not volunteering:

- It is a stressful time and I wanted to take care of my own
 - wellbeing (29%)
- Cannot fit in around paid work (29%)
- Cannot fit in around family or caring commitments (28%)
- Do not want to do in-person volunteering due to health concerns (21%)



The main reasons for currently not volunteering:

- Cannot fit in around paid work (30%)
- It is a stressful time and I wanted to take care of my own wellbeing (26%)
- Cannot fit in around family or caring commitments (25%)
- COVID-19 restrictions made volunteering difficult (20%)

The main reasons for currently not volunteering:

- Do not want to do in-person volunteering due to health concerns (29%)
- Cannot fit in around paid work (25%)
- Cannot fit in around family or caring commitments (23%)
- It is a stressful time and I wanted to take care of my own wellbeing (22%)

Figure 6: Considering volunteering in the future and the most common reasons for currently not volunteering (n= 1,370, i.e. not currently volunteers, TTP6)

Volunteering in the future

We also asked respondents who did not volunteer in the 4 weeks before completing the questionnaire about their intention to volunteer in the future.

More than one half of all respondents would consider volunteering in the future and almost 2 in 5 might consider volunteering. Only 11.3% of all respondents not volunteering at that time would not consider volunteering in the future either.

We observed certain differences in their main reasons for not volunteering at that time between respondents who were considering,

maybe considering and not considering volunteering in the future. While they were almost equally likely to report that they cannot fit in around paid work or around family or caring commitments, those who would not consider volunteering were more likely to report that they did not want to do in-person volunteering due to health concerns.

Also, those who would consider volunteering in the future were more likely to not volunteer due to COVID-19 restrictions which made volunteering difficult. It appears that they might (re)start volunteering after the end of the pandemic.

Attitudes towards volunteering

In the second part of the report, we analyse The Tasmania Project 5 (TTP5) survey data to investigate the attitudes of volunteers towards their main volunteering role (volunteers) and also volunteering in general (non-volunteers). First, we present the results on the sector of volunteering and respondents' satisfaction with other volunteers, paid staff and their supervisors.

Sector of volunteering

Out of 764 respondents who reported volunteering at the time of survey or in the past (about 70% of the whole sample), the largest proportion selected *welfare/community* (26.6%)

as the sector they mostly volunteer in. The second most common answer was *sport and physical recreation* with 18.9% and all other sectors had a relative frequency below 10%:

- (1) Arts/heritage/culture (8.1%),
- (2) Environment (6.8%),
- (3) Emergency services (6.5%),
- (4) Education and training (5.1%),
- (5) Faith-based (4.7%), etc.

In the free text answers provided by those who selected Other, some interesting areas emerged, such as *animal welfare/rescue*.

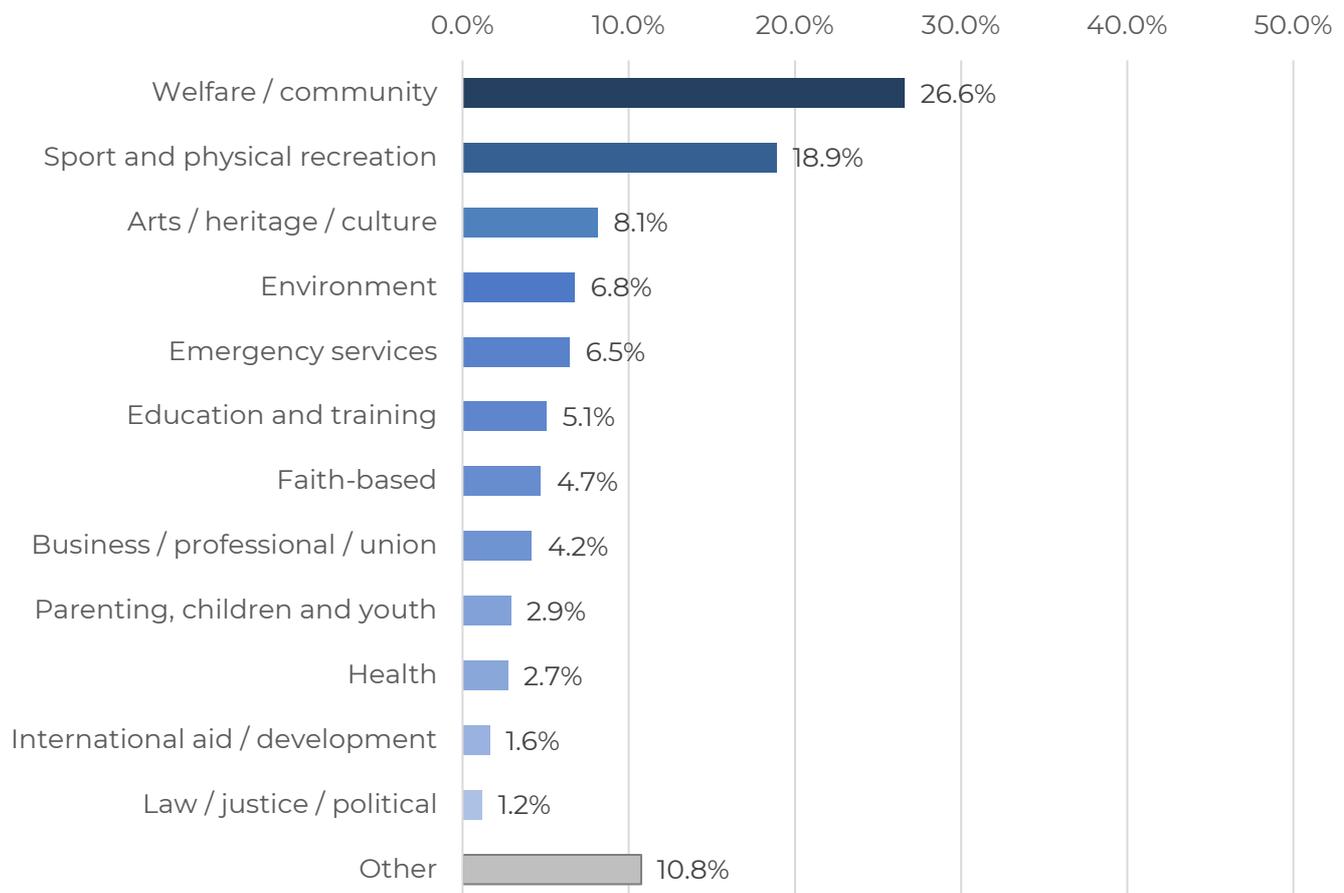


Figure 7: Sector respondents mostly volunteered in (n=764, i.e. present or past volunteers, TTP5)

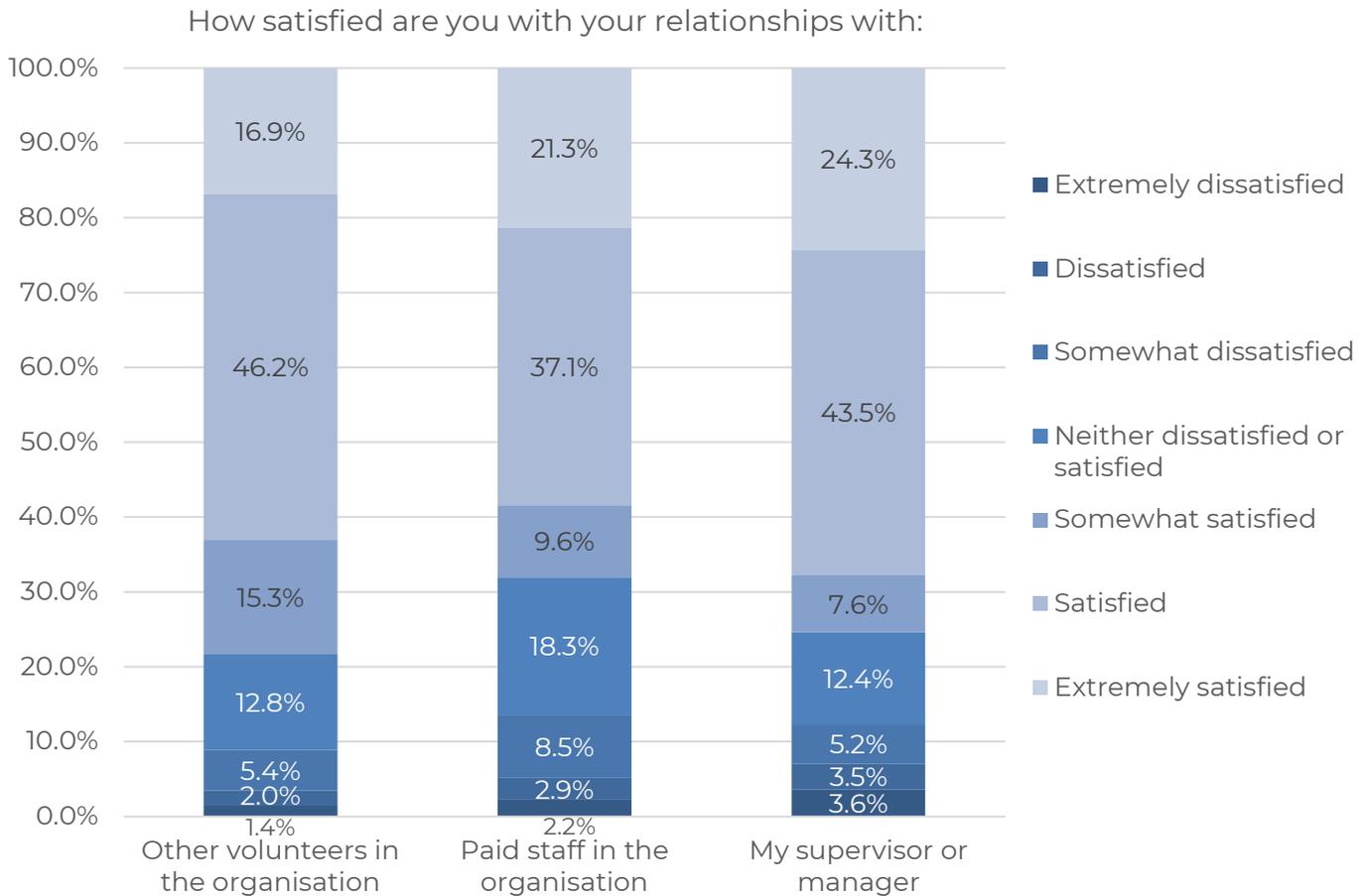


Figure 8: Satisfaction with other people from the volunteering organisation (n=764, i.e. present or past volunteers, TTP5)

Satisfaction with other volunteers, paid staff and supervisors

Past volunteers and volunteers at the time of survey were also asked about their satisfaction in their main volunteering role with (a) other volunteers in the organisation, (b) paid staff in the organisation, (c) their supervisor/manager.

On average, volunteering respondents in TTP5 reported similar levels of satisfactions with different types of people in the organisation they volunteered for. However, there were some differences worth mentioning.

The results show that the largest proportion of volunteers was extremely satisfied with their supervisor/manager (24.3%), followed by paid staff in the organisation (21.3%) and other volunteers in the organisation (16.9%). On

the other hand, after combining categories extremely satisfied, satisfied and somewhat satisfied, we can report that 78.3% of all volunteers were satisfied with other volunteers in the organisation, 75.4% were satisfied with their supervisor, and slightly less of them, 68.1%, were satisfied with paid staff in the organisation.

The results also show that, when it comes to satisfaction with other volunteers in the organisation, respondents are more likely to be undecided or moderately satisfied, while the satisfaction with supervisors or managers varies more substantially. Besides reporting higher levels of extreme satisfaction, we can also report a larger proportion of respondents (extremely) dissatisfied with their supervisor/manager (7.1%).

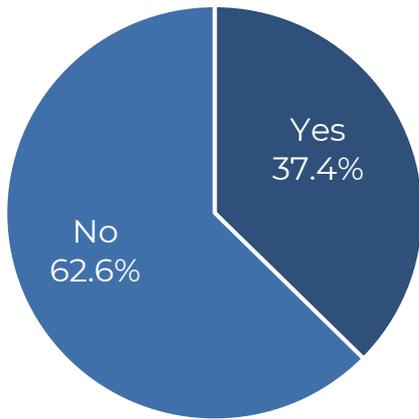


Figure 9: Quitting a volunteering role before March 2020 (n=764, i.e. present or past volunteers, TTP5)

Quitting a volunteering role before the pandemic

Respondents who had volunteered in Tasmania at any time point were asked the following question: *Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020), did you ever quit a volunteering role?*

Out of all volunteers and past volunteers in the sample, 37.4% reported that they quit a volunteering role before March 2020 and 62.6% reported they never quit a volunteering role before the start of the pandemic.

Reasons for quitting a volunteering role before the pandemic

The volunteers who had quit a volunteering role provided various reasons on why they decided to quit volunteering, and some of them provided more than one reason for making that decision.

We can report to some extent similar reasons why volunteers quit as for why they do not currently volunteer (see Figure 5 based on TTP6 data for more information). For example, TTP5 respondents quit because they had to either focus on paid work (25.7%) or on family or caring

commitments (21.3%), or even on the own wellbeing/health (“I got burnt-out” – 31.0%).

On the other hand, some reasons were associated with their experience with volunteering: conflict with others in the organisation (13.9%) or supervisor/manager (5.1%), and there was too much ‘red tape’ (9.5%). About 1 in 4 volunteers had to quit since they moved away from the area.

Among ‘Other’ reasons, topics such as physical and mental health, and giving opportunities to the others (e.g. younger volunteers) emerged in free text responses.

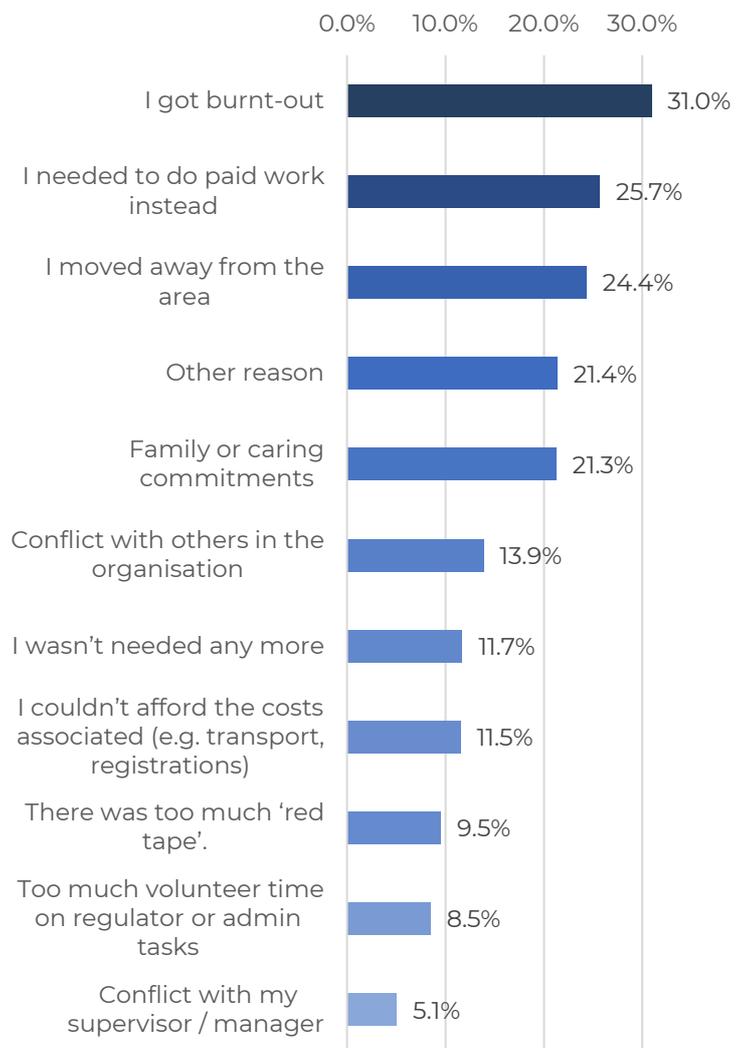


Figure 10: Reasons for quitting a volunteering role (n=277, i.e. present or past volunteers who previously quit, TTP5)

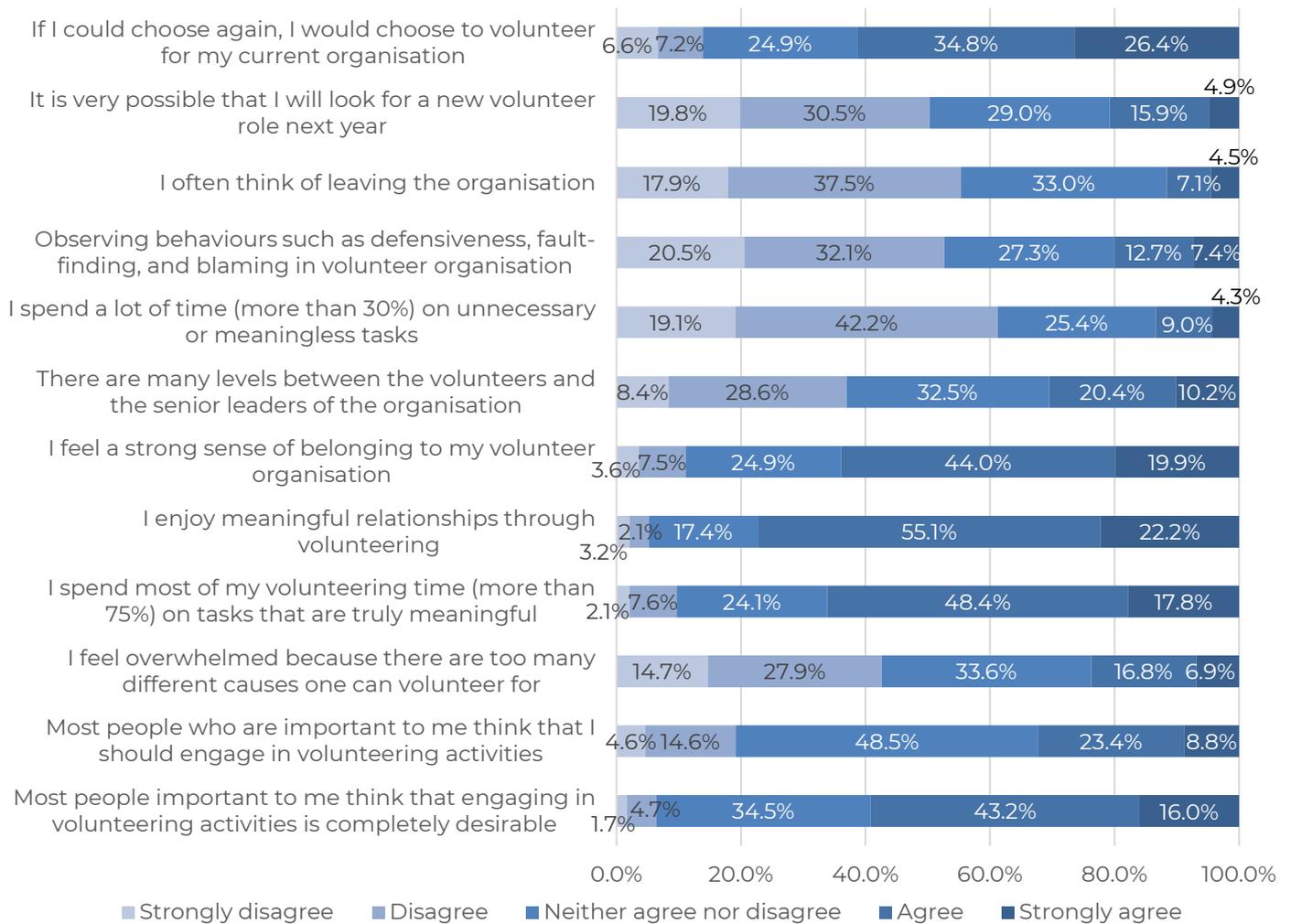


Figure 11: Attitudes towards their main volunteer role (n=764, i.e. present or past volunteers, TTP5)

Attitudes towards their main volunteer role

Present and past volunteers who participated in TTP5 survey were asked a number of questions about their main volunteer role, namely how much they agreed with different statements.

The results show that the largest proportion of respondents (strongly) agreed with the following statements:

- (1) I enjoy meaningful relationships through volunteering (77.3%),
- (2) I spend most of my volunteering time on tasks that are truly meaningful (66.2%), and
- (3) I feel a strong sense of belonging to my volunteer organisation (63.9%).

On the other hand, TTP5 volunteers were more likely to (strongly) disagree than (strongly) agree with the following statements:

- (1) I spend a lot of time on unnecessary or meaningless tasks (61.3% (strongly) disagreed),
- (2) I often think of leaving the organisation (55.4% (strongly) disagreed),
- (3) I regularly observe behaviours such as defensiveness, fault-finding, and blaming in my volunteer organisation (52.6% (strongly) disagreed), and
- (4) It is very possible that I will look for a new volunteer role next year (50.3% (strongly) disagreed).

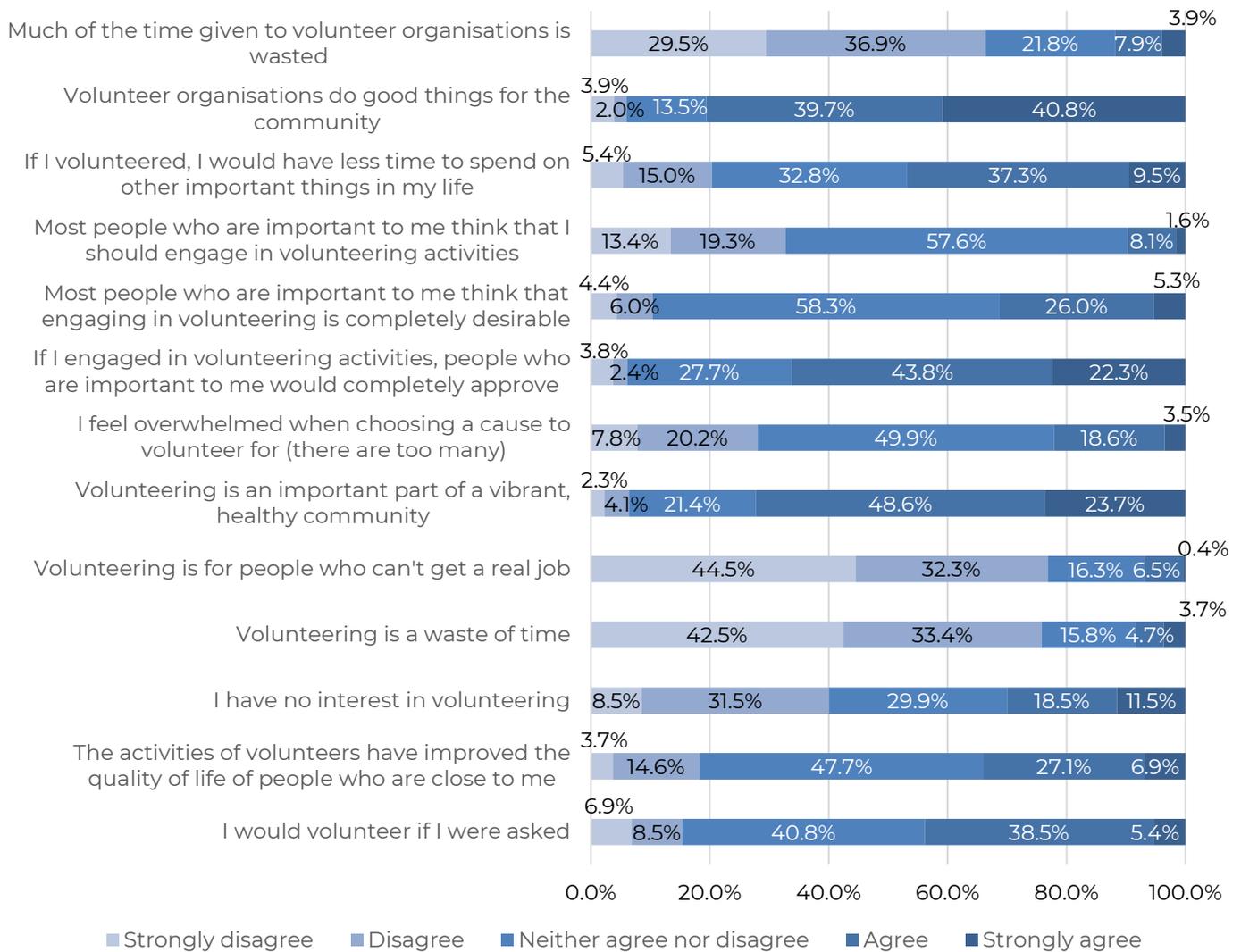


Figure 12: Attitudes towards volunteering in general (n=343, never volunteered in Tasmania, TTP5)

General attitudes towards volunteering

The respondents who never volunteered (in Tasmania) were asked a number of questions about their general attitudes towards volunteering.

The results show that the largest proportion of those respondents (strongly) agreed with the following statements:

- (1) Volunteer organisations do good things for the community (80.5%)
- (2) Volunteering is an important part of a vibrant, healthy community (72.3%)
- (3) I engaged in volunteering activities, people

who are important to me would completely approve (66.1%)

On the other hand, TTP5 non-volunteers were more likely to (strongly) disagree than (strongly) agree with the following:

- (1) Volunteering is for people who can't get a real job (76.8% (strongly) disagreed)
- (2) Volunteering is a waste of time (75.9% (strongly) disagreed)
- (3) Much of the time given to volunteer organisations is wasted (66.4% (strongly) disagreed)

The evidence suggests that even non-volunteers generally have a very positive attitudes towards volunteering.