



Rapid Social Impact Assessment of the COVID-19 Outbreak in Montenegro

September 2021





The goal

- To provide deeper insight into the social impact of the evolving crisis on groups in Montenegro that are already vulnerable.
- To identify potential **new groups** of people who have become highly vulnerable due to the COVID-19 crisis, particularly focusing on the previous six months.
- **To provide evidence for decision-makers** to tailor **ongoing and future policy and programmatic interventions** to alleviate the negative **consequences of the pandemic** on the people of Montenegro, with a particular focus on protecting the fundamental rights of those who are most vulnerable.

Data and methods

- **Mixed methods approach:**
 - Nationally representative public opinion survey (sample size: 1,063 respondents)
 - Specific vulnerable groups using qualitative methods:
 - Children
 - Adolescents
 - Elderly
 - Persons with disabilities
 - Domicile Roma
 - Refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons (at risk of statelessness)
 - Migrants (seasonal workers, foreigners)
 - LGBTI community
 - Disadvantaged persons who are not recipients of social welfare
 - Tenants
- Indirect data collection via relevant authorities and civil society organizations:
 - Victims of gender-based violence
 - Child victims/witnesses of violence
 - People in detention, including children in correctional facilities
- Administrative data from the integrated Social Welfare Information System (SWIS) on citizens' requests for one-off financial assistance.
- Consultation with CSO partners
- Timeframe: April–May 2021
- **Ethical standards of research**



Over 30 partners supported data collection

The Ministry of Finance and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights, the Ombudsperson's Office, the Police Directorate, the Council for Civilian Oversight of the Police, the Institute for Social and Child Protection, CSW Bar & Ulcinj, CSW Berane, Andrijevica & Petnjica, CSW Bijelo Polje, CSW Cetinje, CSW Danilovgrad, CSW Herceg Novi, CSW Kotor, Tivat & Budva, CSW Mojkovac & Kolašin, CSW Nikšić, Šavnik & Plužine, CSW Pljevlja & Žabljak, CSW Podgorica, Golubovci & Tuzi, CSW Plav & Gusinje, the "Mladost" Children's Home, Bijela, "Ljubović" Centre for Children and Youth, "Grabovac" Nursing Home Risan, Day-Care Centre for Children and Persons with Disabilities Pljevlja, NGO Association of Youth with Disabilities, NGO Phiren Amenca, NGO Centre for Roma Initiatives, NGF Civic Alliance, NGO Juventas, the Red Cross of Montenegro, NGO Parents Association, NGO Family Centre, NGO Centre for Child Rights, NGO Special Olympics, NGO Pedagogical Centre of Montenegro, NGO Centre for Women's Rights, NGO Helpline Podgorica, NGO Helpline Nikšić, NGO Safe House for Women, UNICEF Youth Innovation Lab, NGO Queer Montenegro, NGO LGBT Forum Progres, NGO Spektra, NGO Stana and NGO My Home – Association of Tenants

***Assessment of the impact of coronavirus on
the general population and households in
Montenegro***

IMPACT ON FINANCES
AND EMPLOYMENT

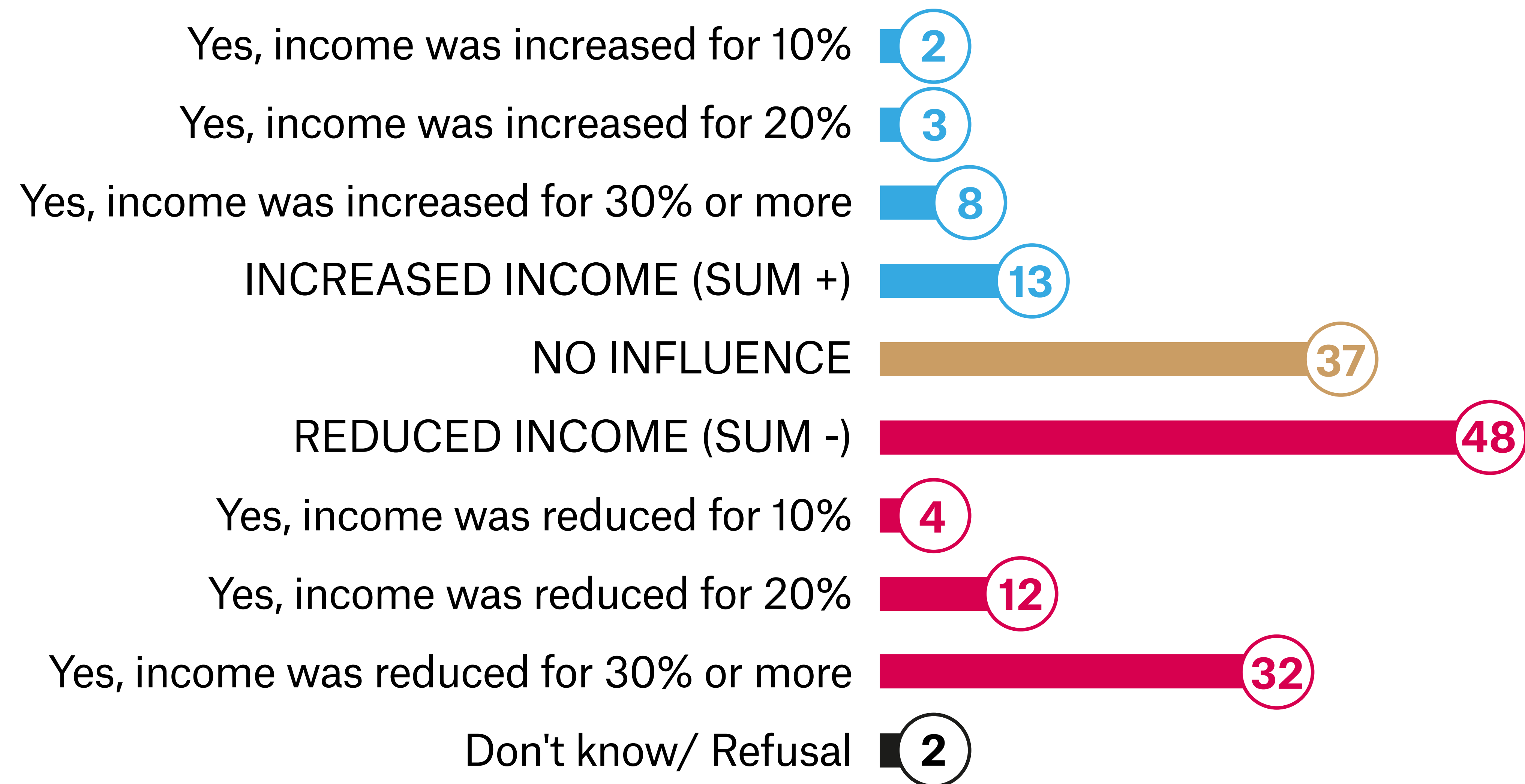


ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS ON THE FINANCIAL SITUATION

Almost half of the citizens of Montenegro have had their income reduced in the past six months, while one third say that this reduction is 30% or more. On the other hand, almost two fifths of citizens state that coronavirus hasn't affected their financial situation in the past six months (since September 2020), and these are mainly citizens older than 60 years and members of one and two-member households. Almost half of all citizens expect a reduction of their income in the next three months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

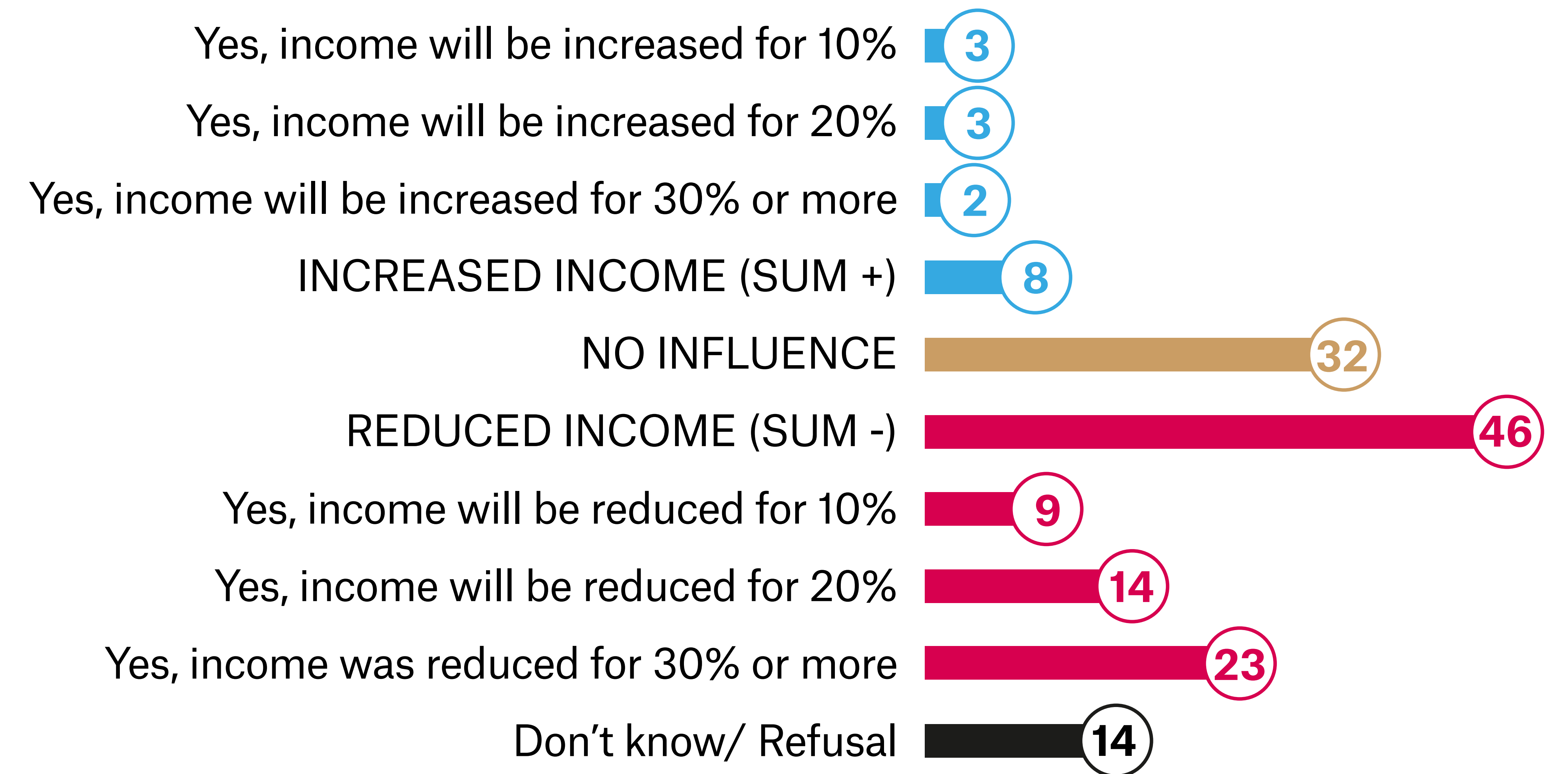
Income since September 2020

Data in %

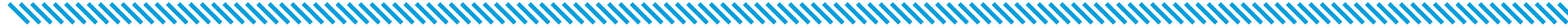


Has coronavirus affected your and your family's financial situation in the past six months compared with the situation before the pandemic?
Base: Total target population, N=1,063

Expectations for the next 3 months (April - June 2021)



In your opinion, what will be the effects of coronavirus on your and your family's financial situation in the next three months (April-June 2021) compared with the situation before the pandemic?
Base: Total target population, N=1,063

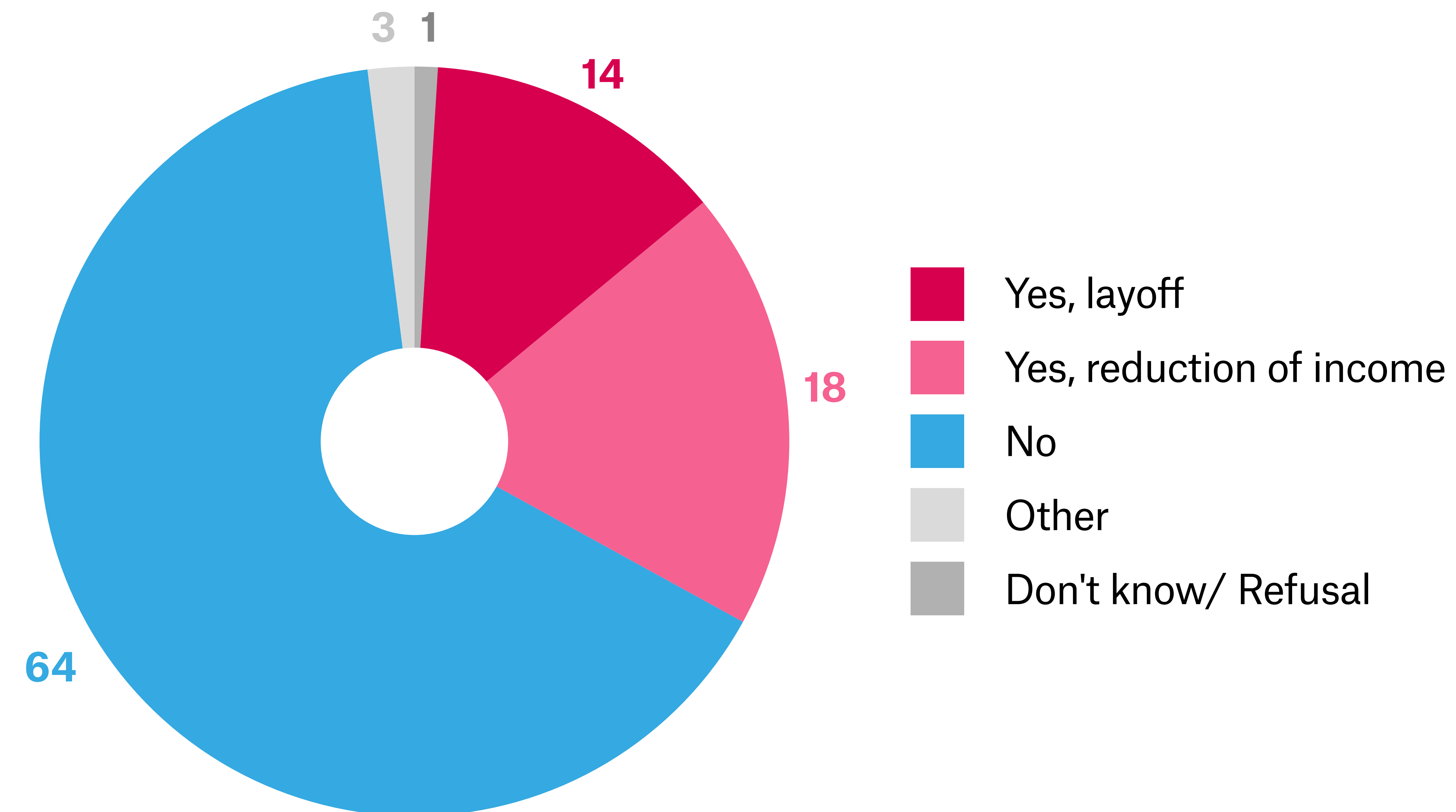


IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Almost two in three respondents reported that COVID-19 had no impact on their employment status. The total of 18% had their salary reduced, primarily in the southern part of Montenegro, while 14% reported the loss of their jobs, among whom a substantial share is accounted for by persons with only primary or lower levels of education.

Data in %

Has the situation with Covid-19 affected your employment status?



Base: Those who were formally or informally employed before the pandemic (54% of the total target population)

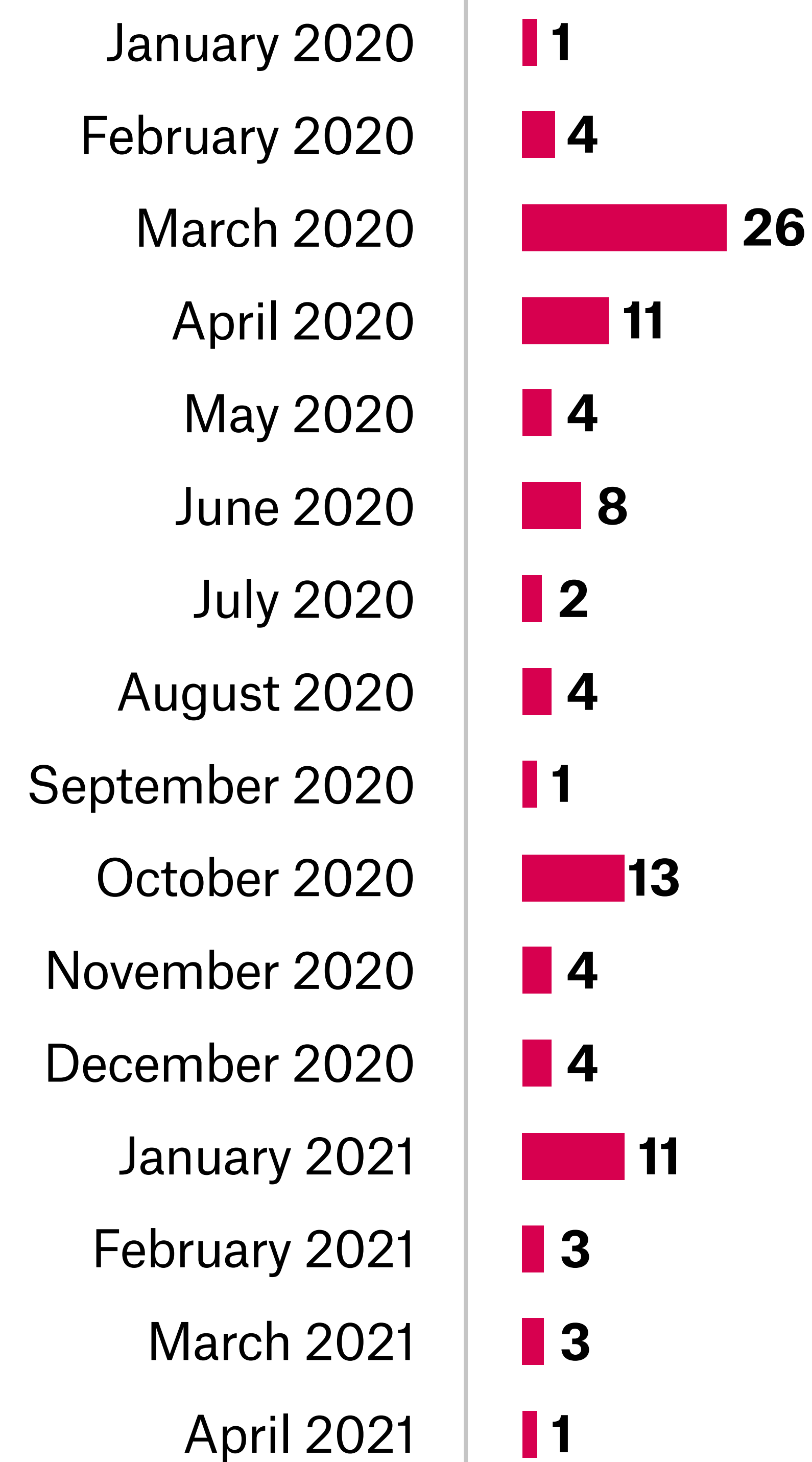


IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LAYOFFS

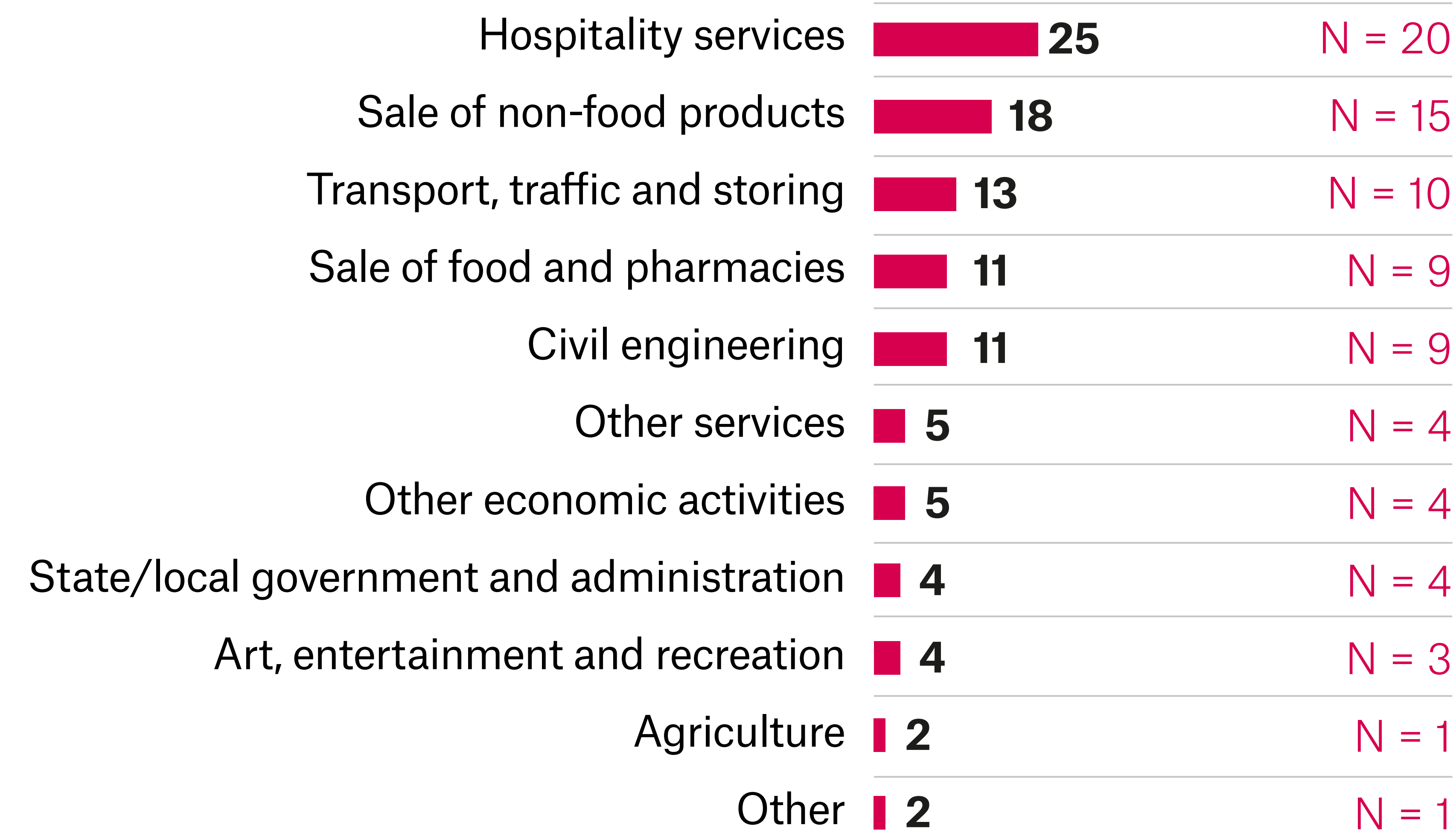
Most laid-off respondents had their work terminated in March and October 2020 and most of them worked in hospitality and sales prior to being laid off. For 79% of laid-off respondents, the work was not seasonal.

When were you laid off?

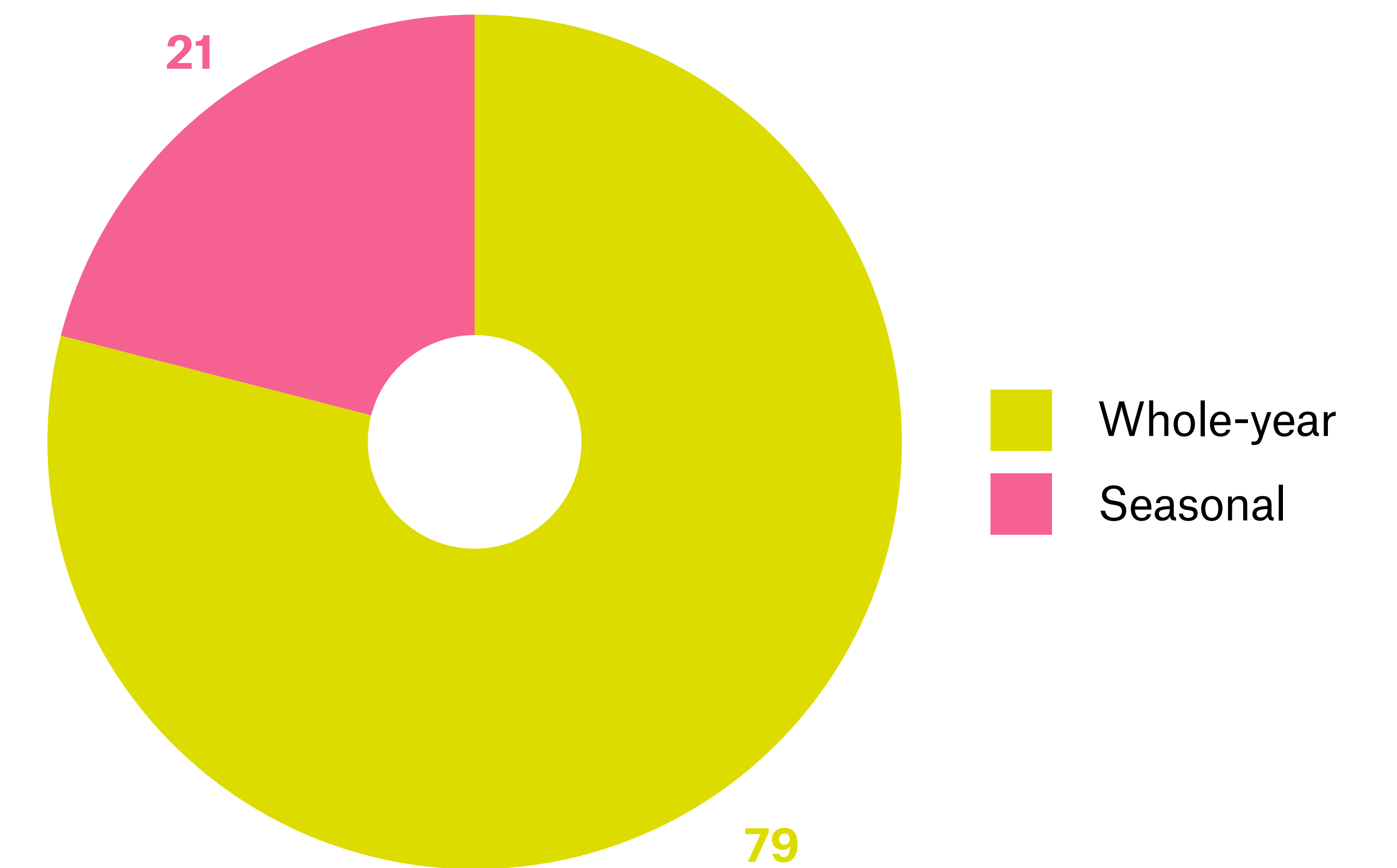
Data in %



What was your economic activity?



Is this job seasonal or not?



Base: Those who were laid off (8% of the total target population)



IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SALARIES

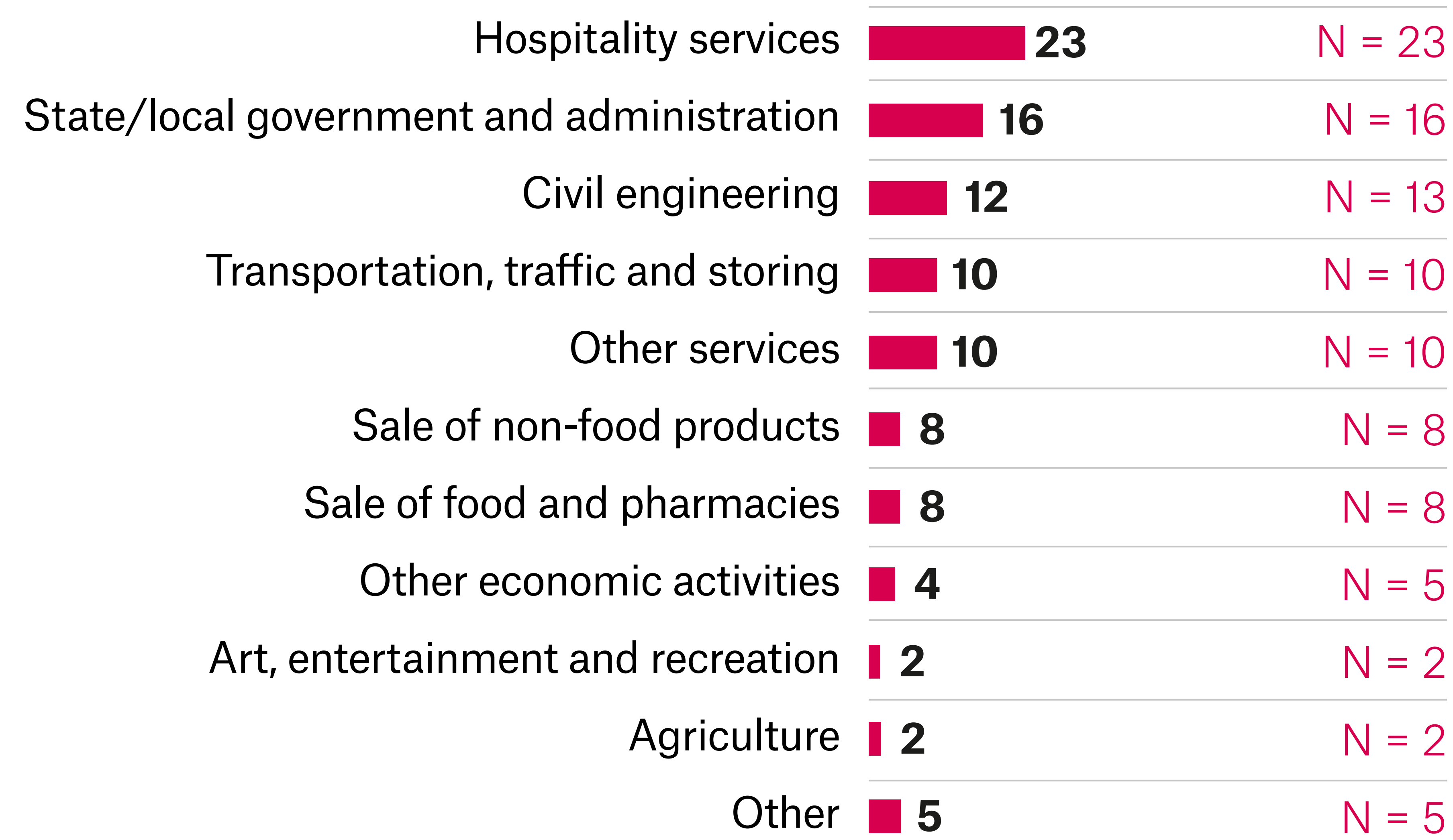
As for those respondents whose **salary was reduced** due to the COVID-19 pandemic, one in five saw such a reduction in March 2020, and 13% in April 2020. Overall, for half of the respondents whose salary was reduced due to the pandemic, this reduction took place between March and June 2020. Salary reductions were most likely in accommodation and food service business, followed by the central or local administration jobs.

When was your salary reduced?

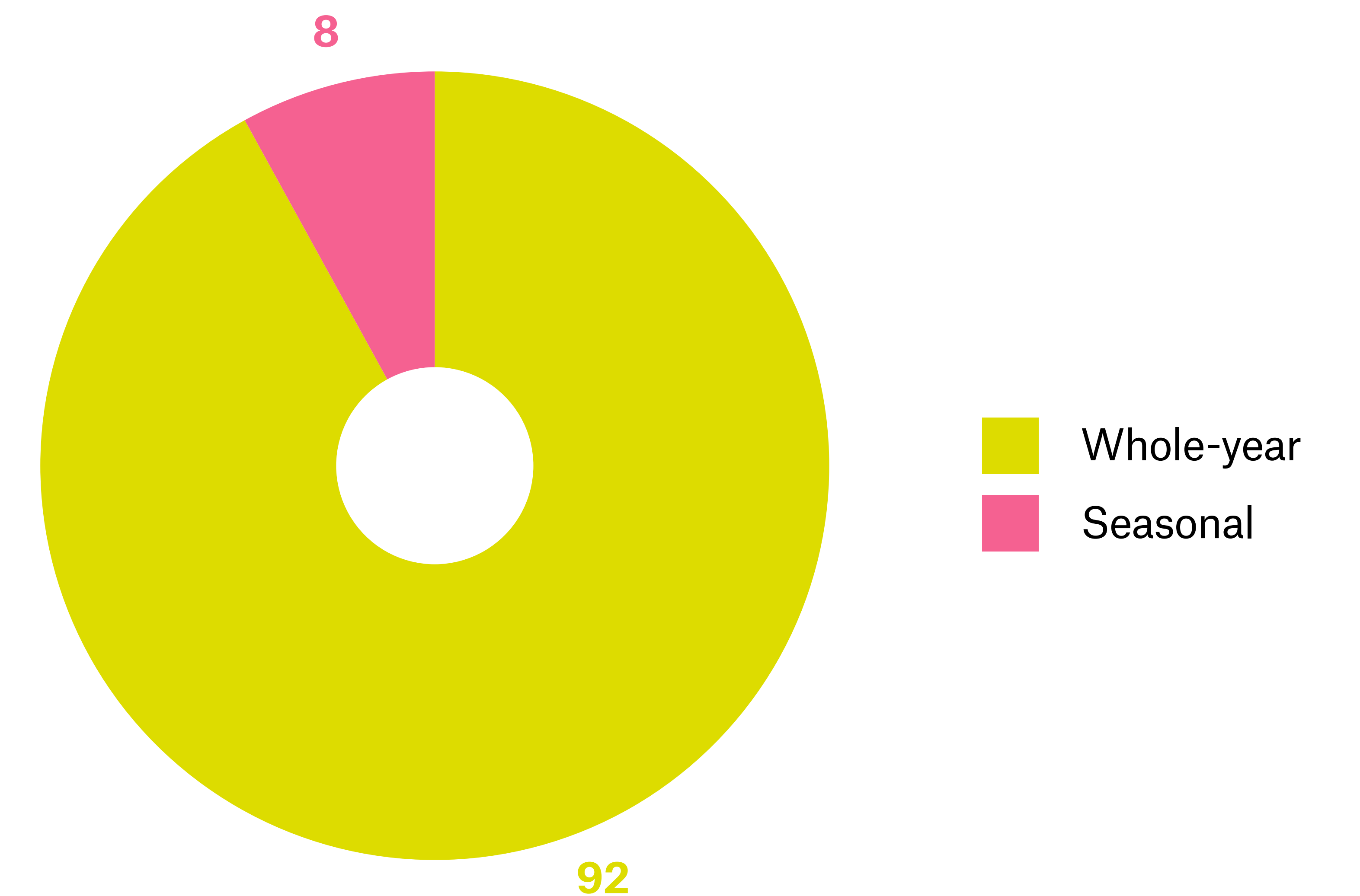
Data in %



What is/was your economic activity?



Is this job seasonal or not?



Base: Those whose salary has been reduced (10% of the total target population)

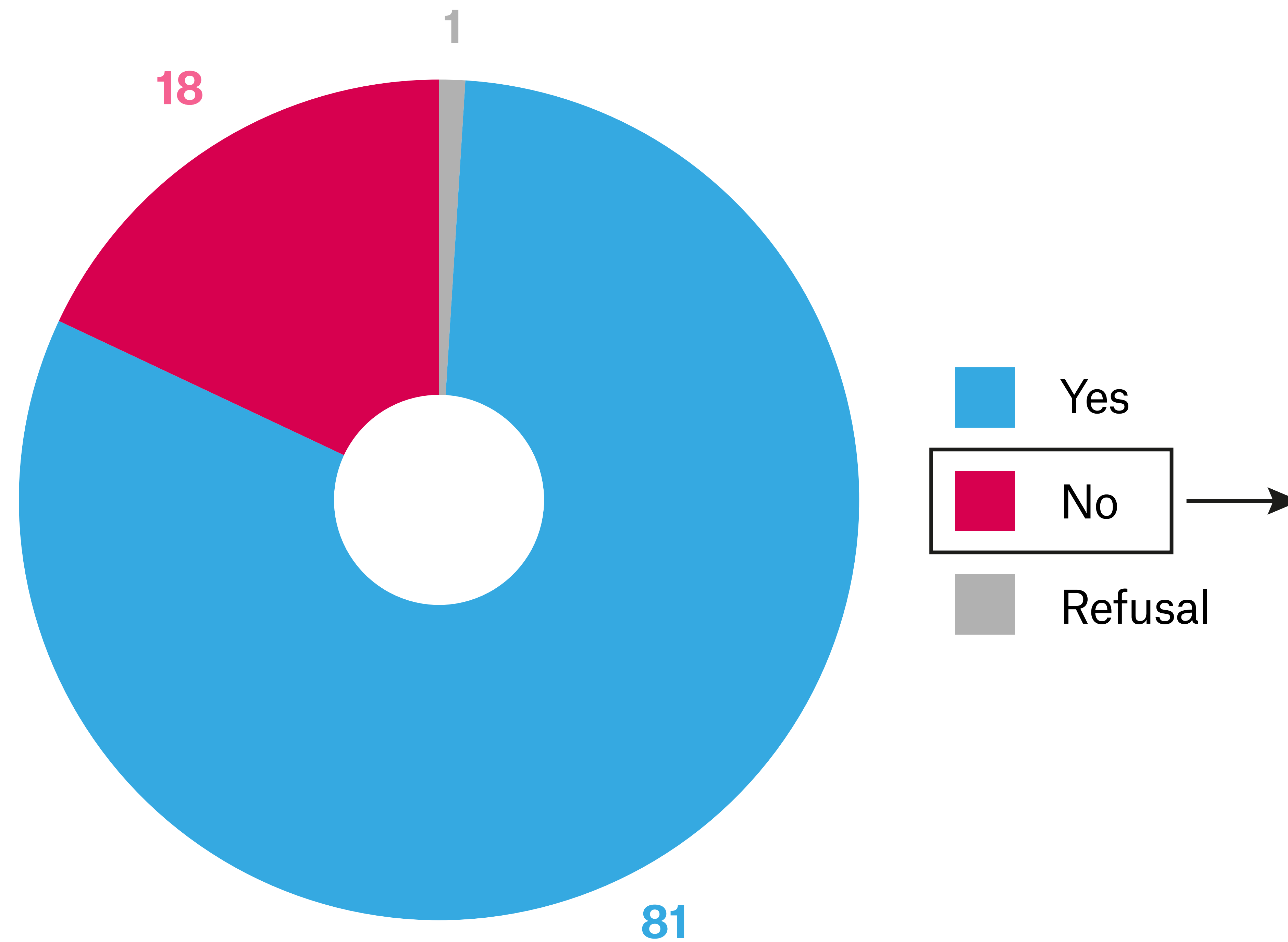


PAID INSURANCE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Close to one in five Montenegrin citizens in formal or informal employment reported that they were not covered by pension contributions or health insurance (i.e. payroll taxes), with persons with secondary education being most likely to fall into this category.

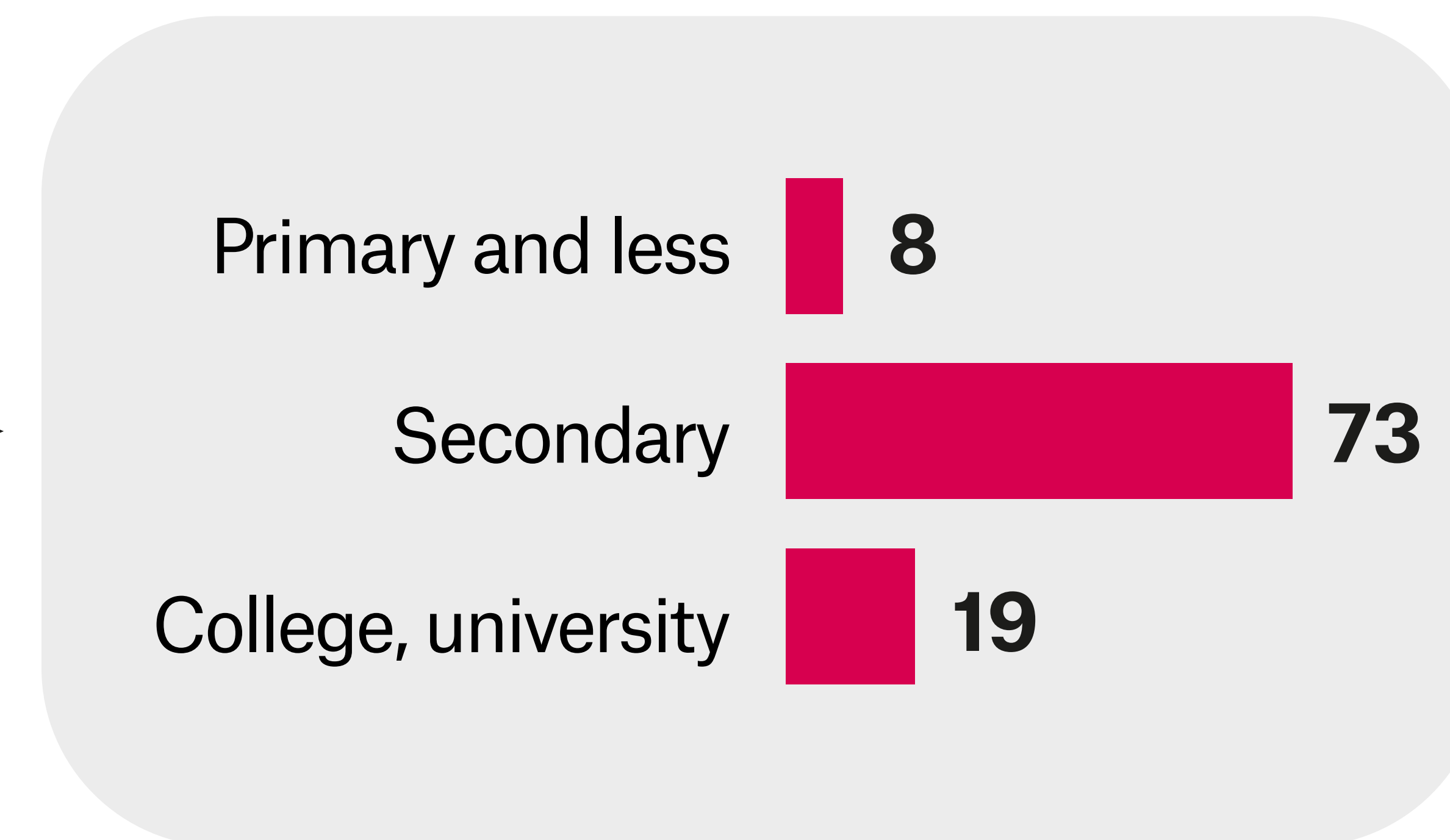
Data in %

Are you currently paid pension and health insurance, taxes and contributions?



Base: Those who are currently formally or informally employed (46% of total target population)

Level of education of citizens who currently do not have paid pension and health insurance, taxes and contributions



Base: Those who are currently formally or informally employed, but without paid pension and health insurance (9% of total target population)

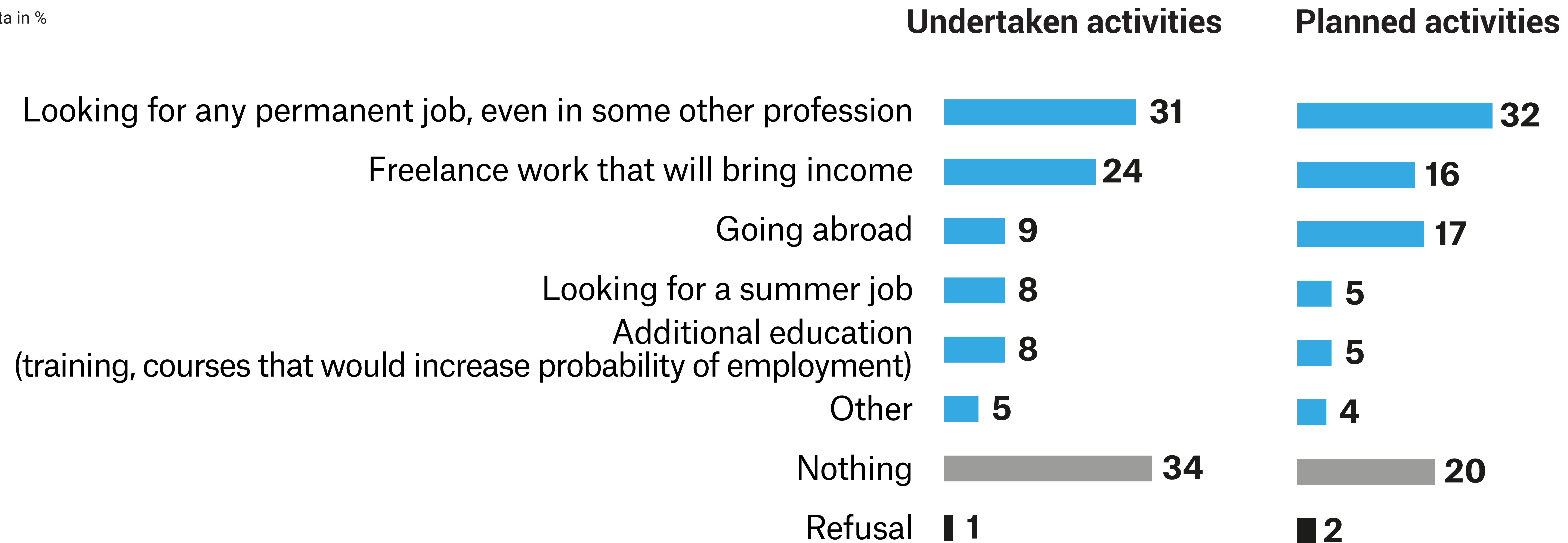


UNDERTAKEN AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR ALTERNATIVE INCOME

Three out of 10 citizens who were laid off or had their salary reduced have looked for any job, even something they weren't educated in in order to compensate for reduced income, while almost one quarter opted for self-employment and 9% went abroad, mainly males.

One third of the citizens who were laid off or had their salary reduced plan to look for any permanent job, even in some other profession; 17% of them plan to head for some other country, mainly citizens from the north and members of multigenerational families. In addition, 16% of citizens plan to be self-employed.

Data in %



Have you done any of the following in order to compensate for your reduced income? – Multiple answers
Base: Those who were laid off or whose salary was reduced (17% of the total target population)

Are you planning to do any of the following in order to compensate for your reduced income? – Multiple answers
Base: Those who were laid off or whose salary was reduced (17% of the total target population)

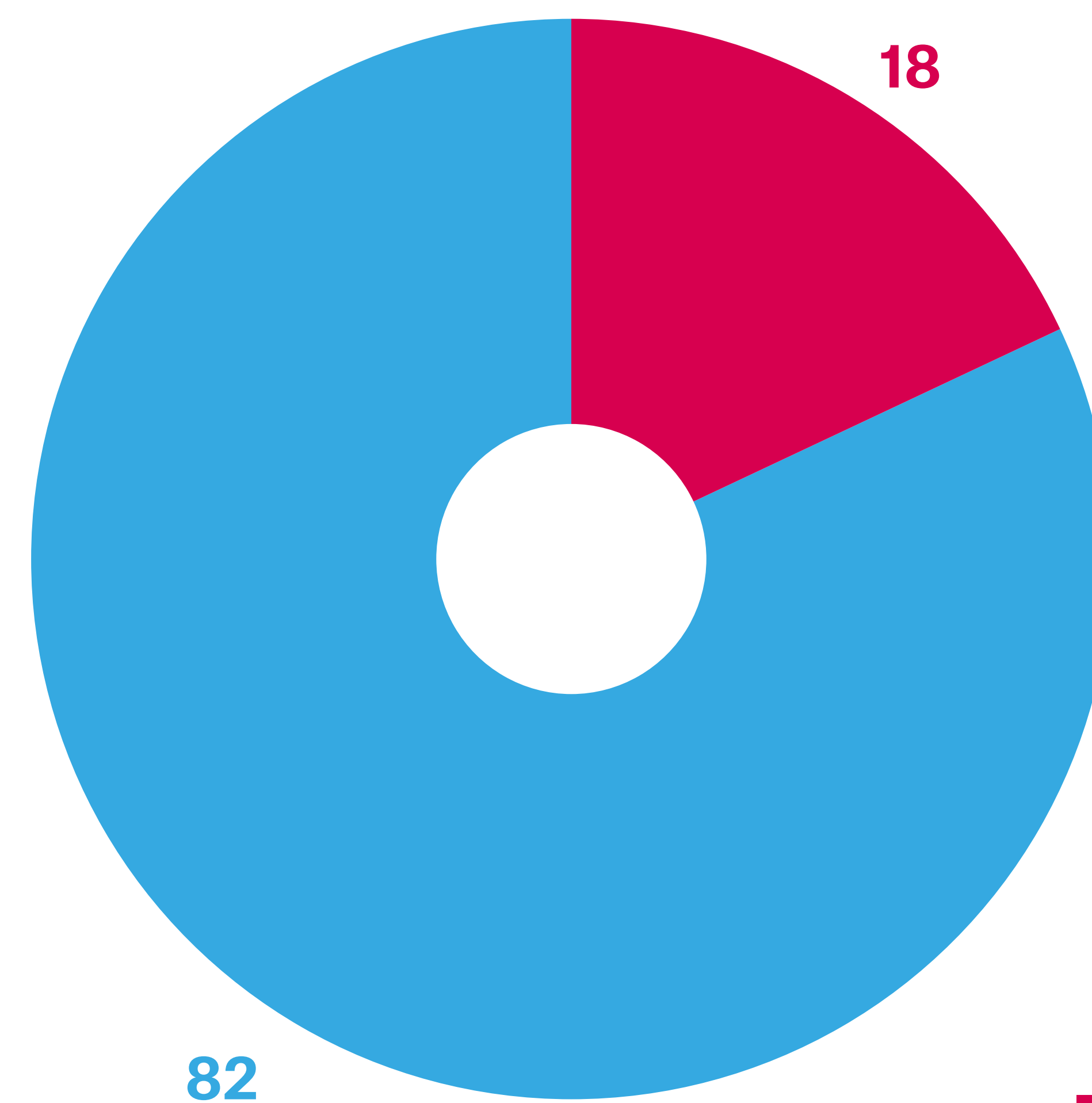


IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME OF HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

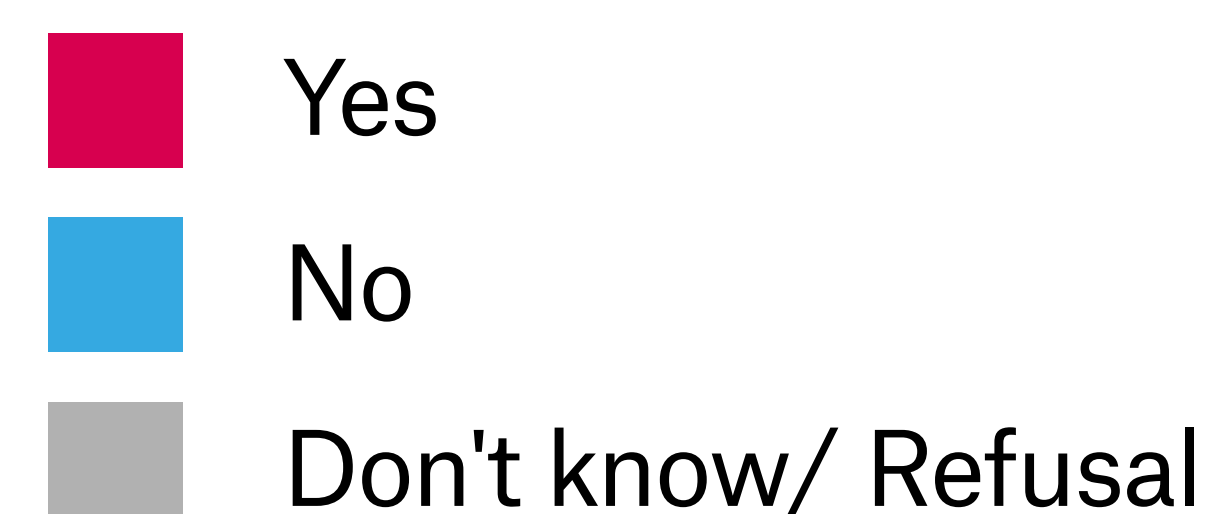
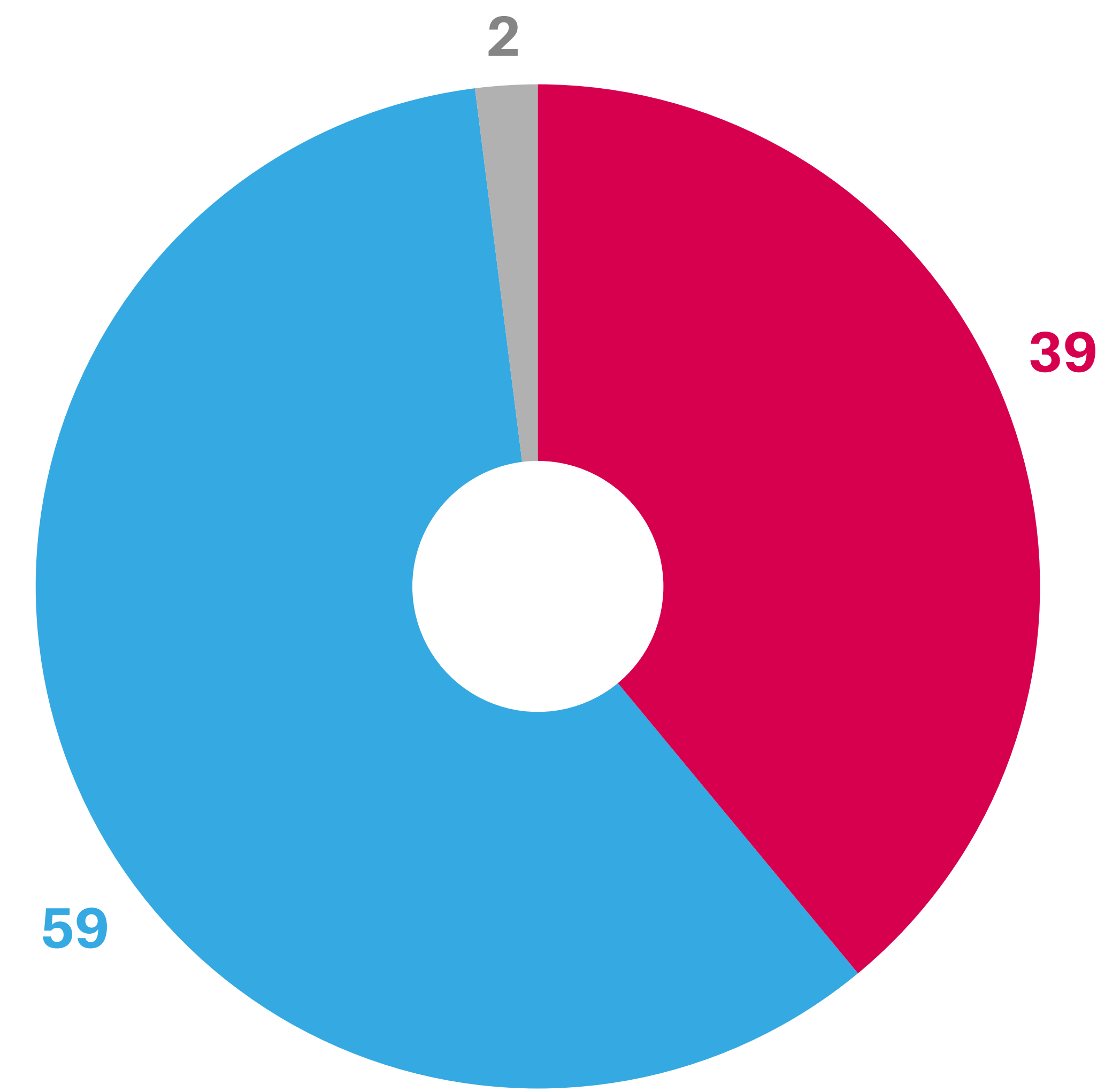
Almost one in five Montenegrin citizens reported that some of their household members had been laid off due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents living in a household composed of a married couple with children were more likely to report this. In addition, close to two out of five respondents state that some of their household members had their salary/income reduced. Income/salary reduction is mentioned more often in the south than in other regions and by respondents aged 18–29.

Data in %

Have any of your household members been laid off due to Covid-19 pandemic?



Have any of your household members had reduced income due to Covid-19 pandemic?



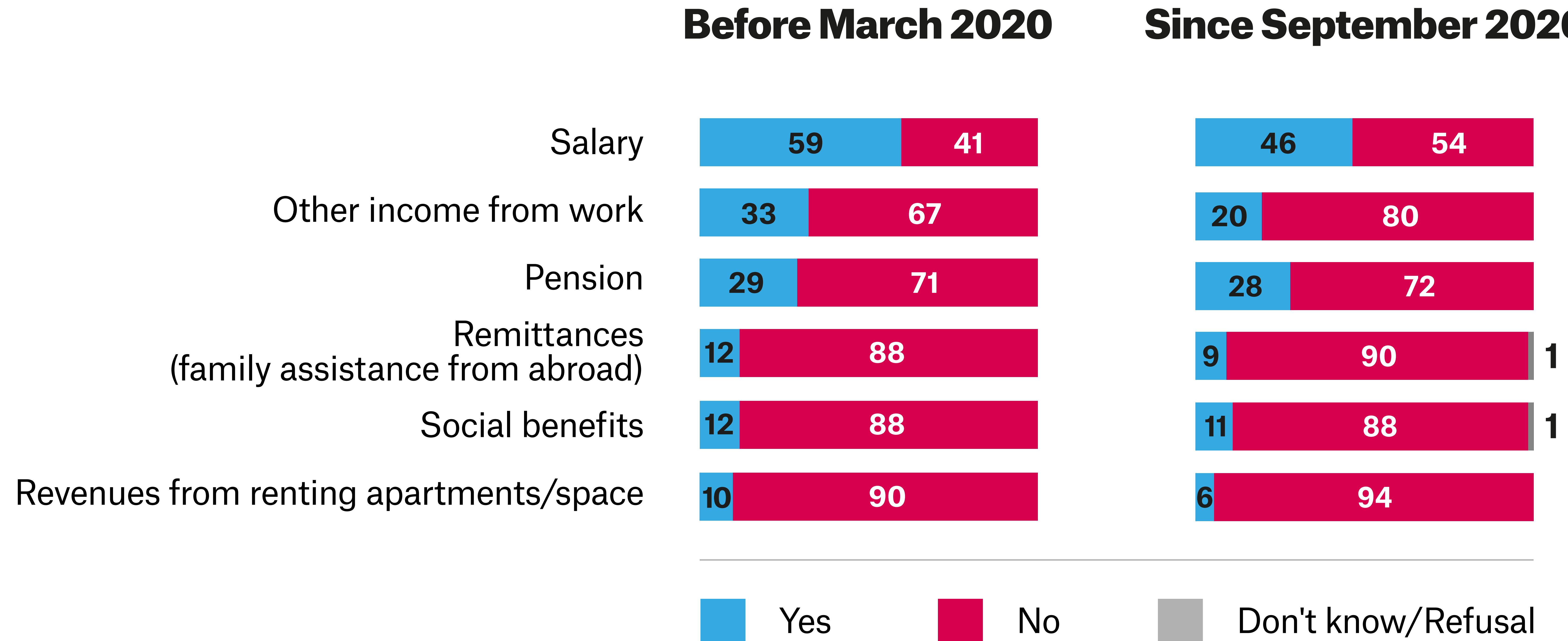
Base: Total target population, N=1,063



REGULARITY OF RECEIVING INCOME BEFORE AND DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Compared to the pre-COVID-19 situation (March 2020), receiving income from salaried and other employment has become less regular, together with income from remittances and from renting apartments/space, while the regularity of income from pension and social benefits has been similar since September 2020.

Data in %



Did you receive regular income from the following sources before the pandemic and in the past six months?
 Base: Total target population, N=1,063

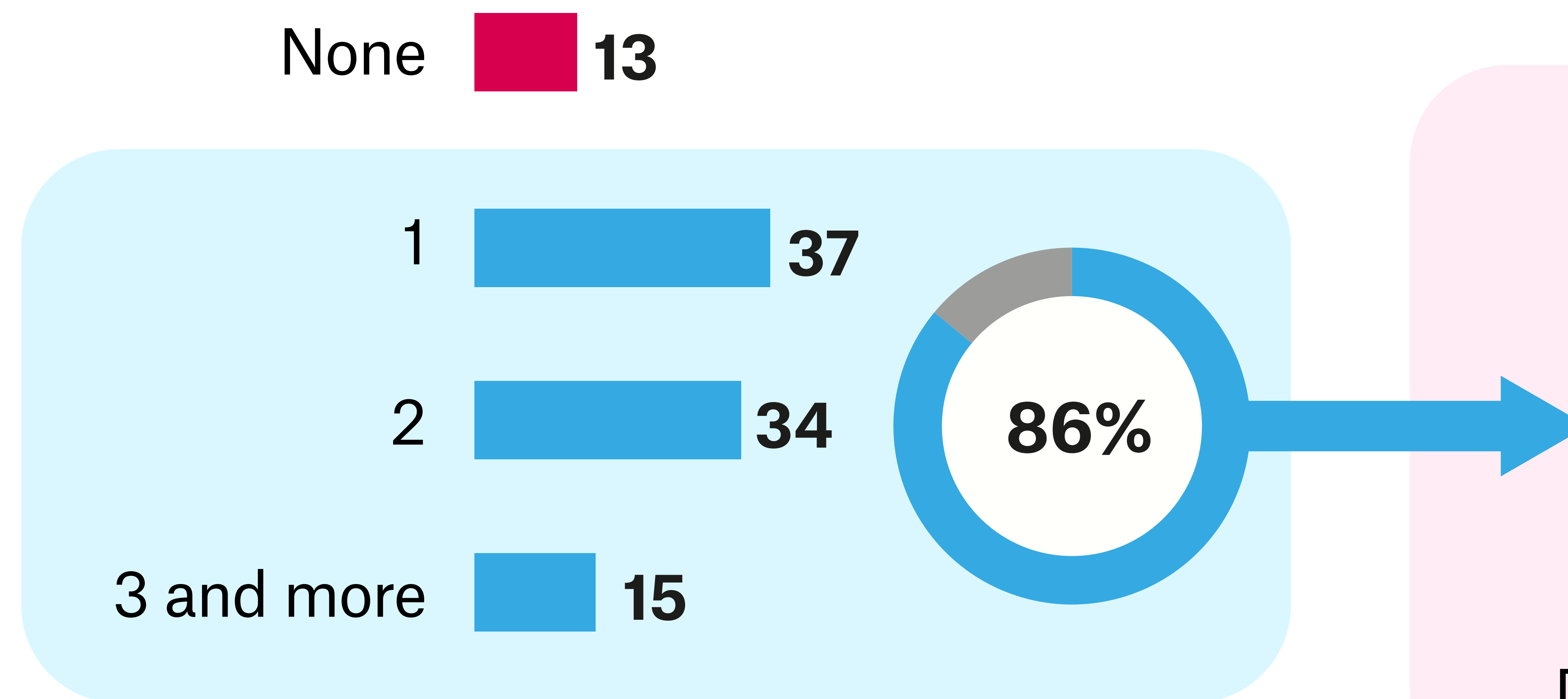


HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS WHO WORK AND HAVE INSURANCE AND CONTRIBUTIONS PAID

More than four out of five respondents state that at least one member of their household currently receives a salary or has some other work-related income. **Among them, 15% report that none of the employed household members have had their payroll taxes and contributions paid.**

Data in %

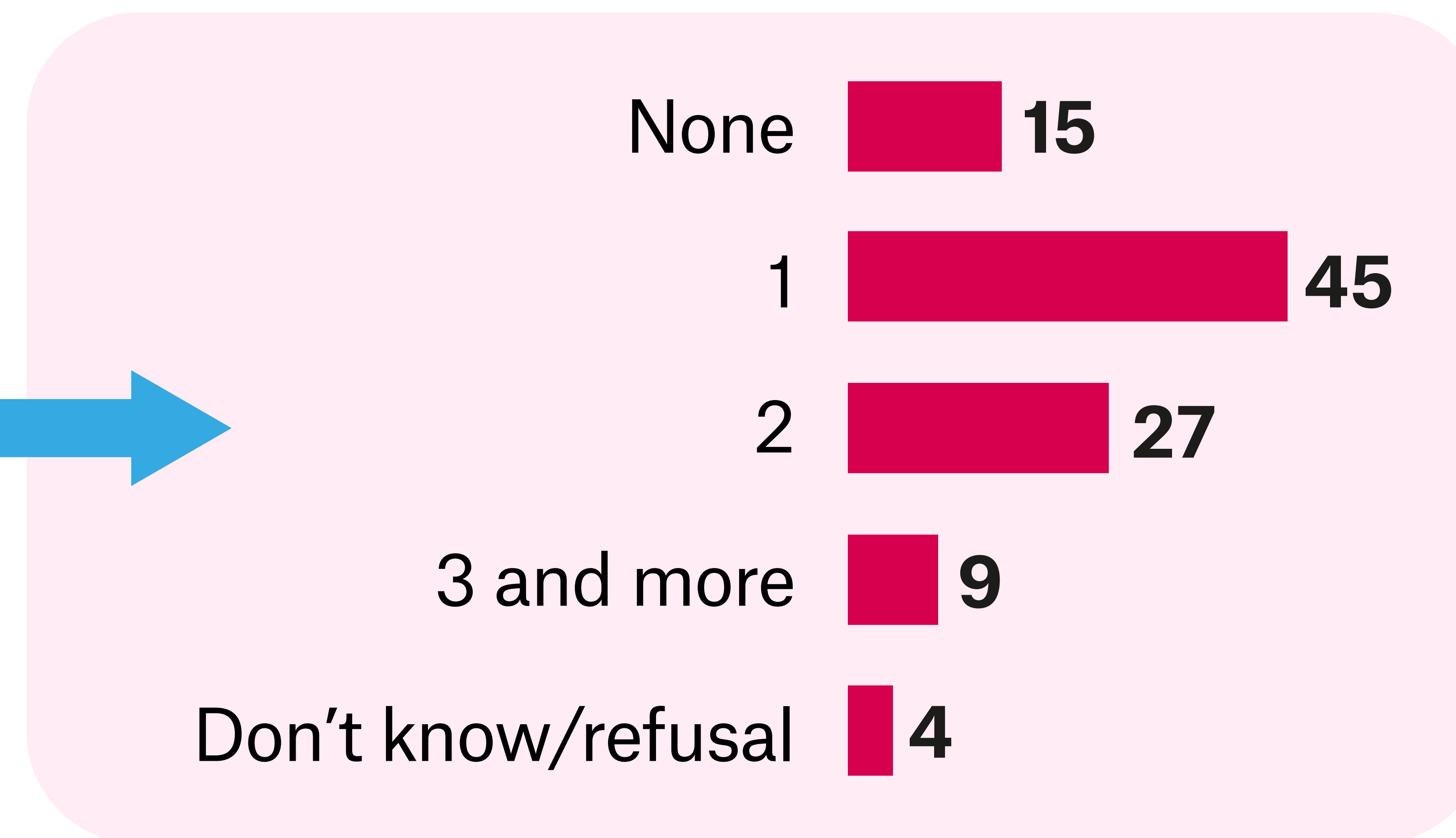
Number of household member/s who currently receive a salary or have other income from work



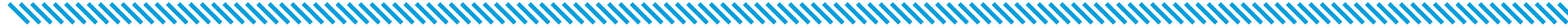
Don't know/refusal | 1

Base: Total target population, N= 1063

Number of household member/s who currently have paid insurance and contributions



Base: Those whose household member/s currently receive a salary or have some other income from work (86% of total target population)

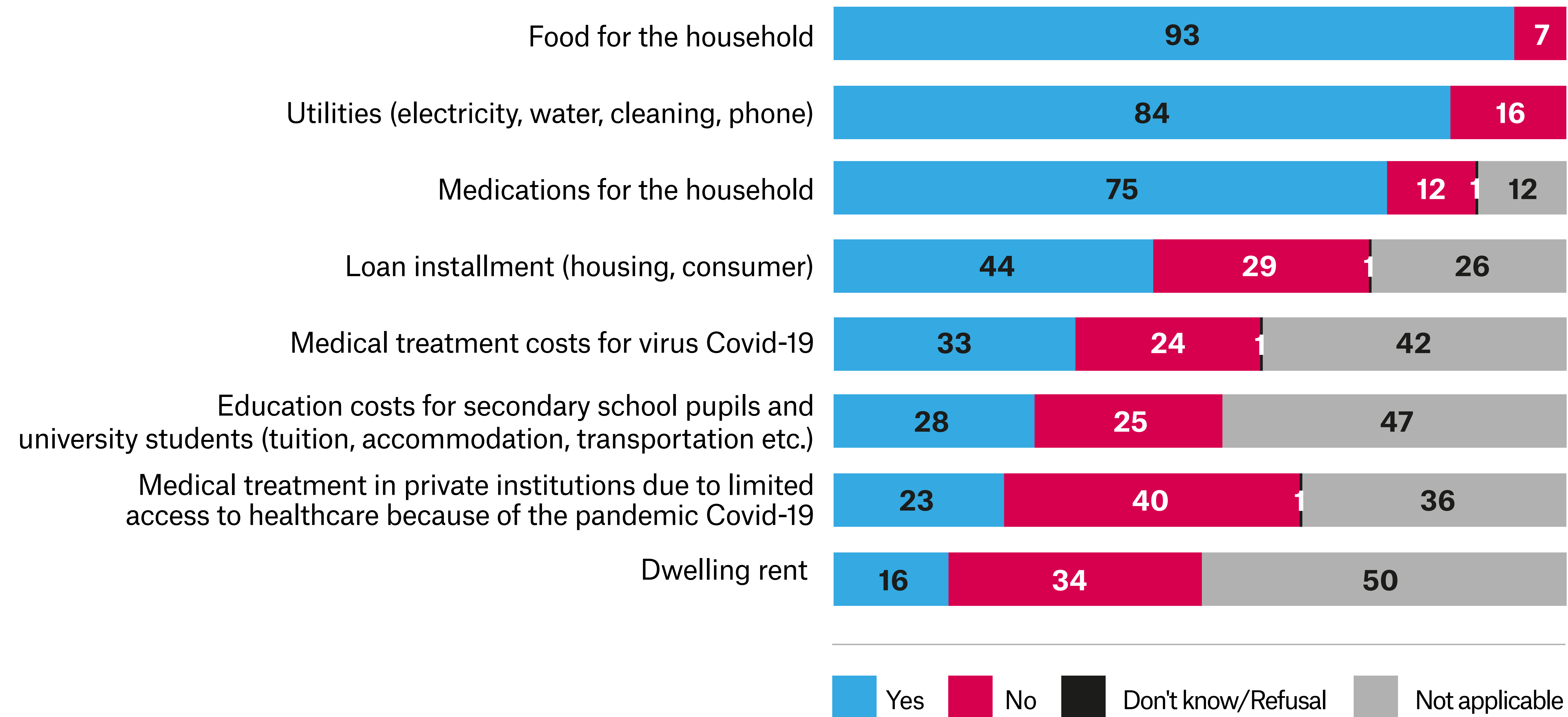


HOUSEHOLDS' ABILITY TO AFFORD DIFFERENT EXPENDITURES

Since September 2020, the large majority of citizens were able to afford food for the household, and more than four fifths of them were able to pay their utility bills. On the other hand, the households of half of the citizens did not have the money to pay either the rent or education costs for secondary school pupils and students, while about two fifths of them could not meet the medical treatment costs for those who contracted coronavirus.

Data in %

Since September 2020



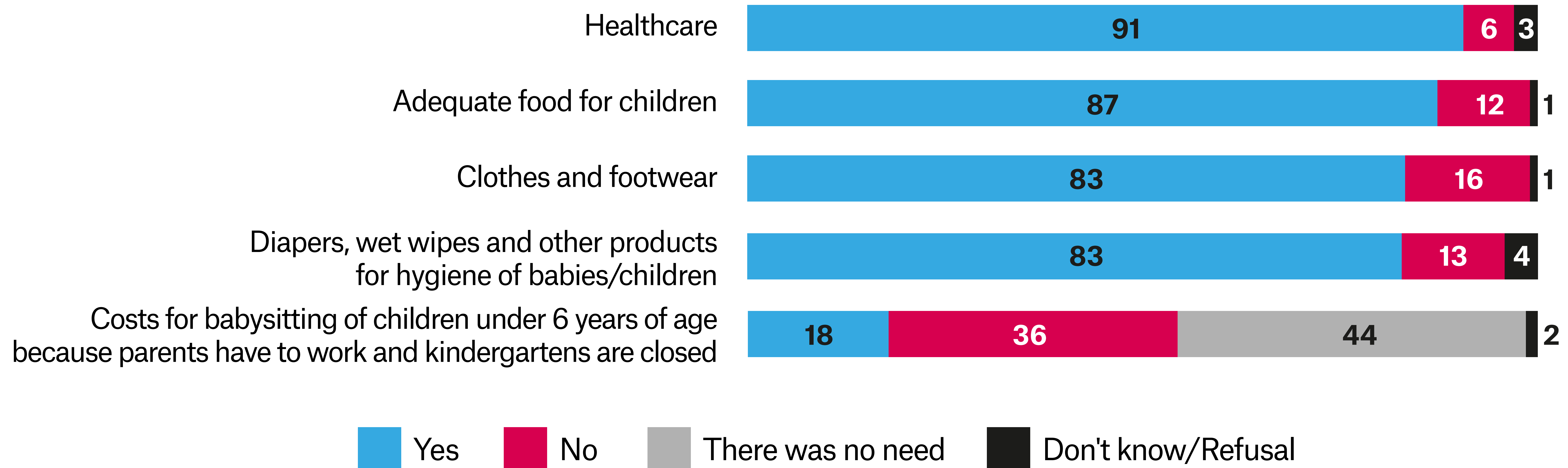


HOUSEHOLDS' ABILITY TO AFFORD PRODUCTS FOR BABIES AND CHILDREN UNDER 6 YEARS OF AGE

In the past six months (since September 2020), the large majority of households with a baby or children under 6 years of age were able to afford healthcare and adequate food, while more than four fifths were able to provide clothes and footwear as well as hygiene products. In addition, 36% of households could not meet the costs for babysitting of children under 6 years of age because the parents had to work and kindergartens were closed.

Data in %

Since September 2020



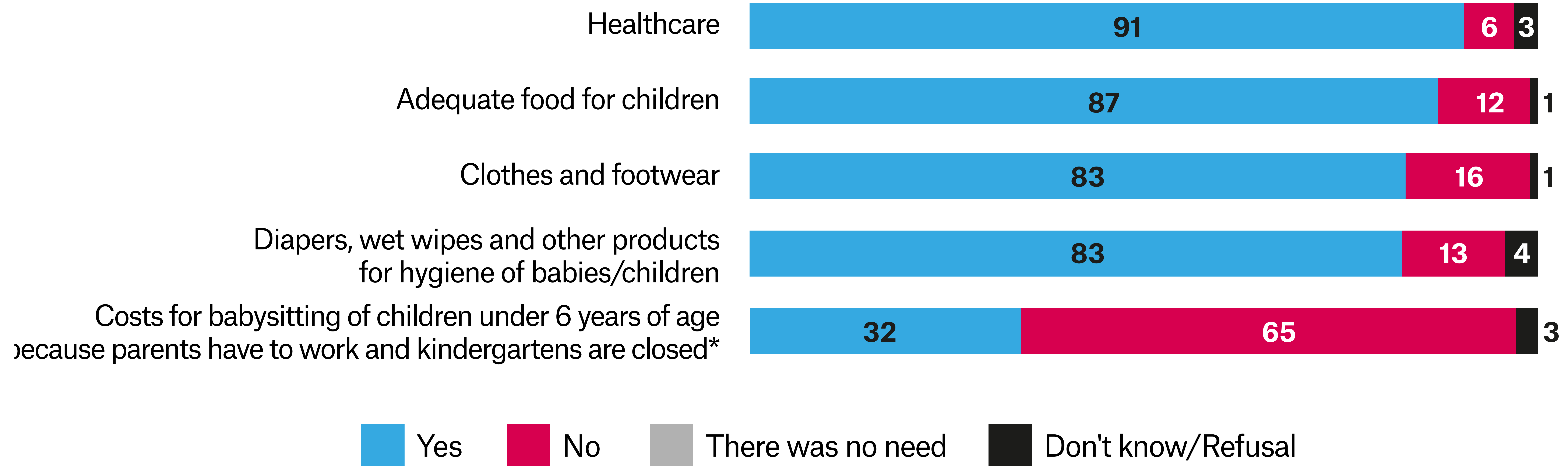


HOUSEHOLDS' ABILITY TO AFFORD PRODUCTS FOR BABIES AND CHILDREN UNDER 6 YEARS OF AGE

As many as almost two thirds of parents who did need babysitting for their children because they had to work and kindergartens were closed, were not able to afford this cost.

Data in %

Since September 2020



Was your household able to afford the following products for babies and children under 6 years of age during the past six months?

Base: Those who have a baby or child under 6 in the household, N=242

* Recalculated data for citizens who didn't answer: There was no need

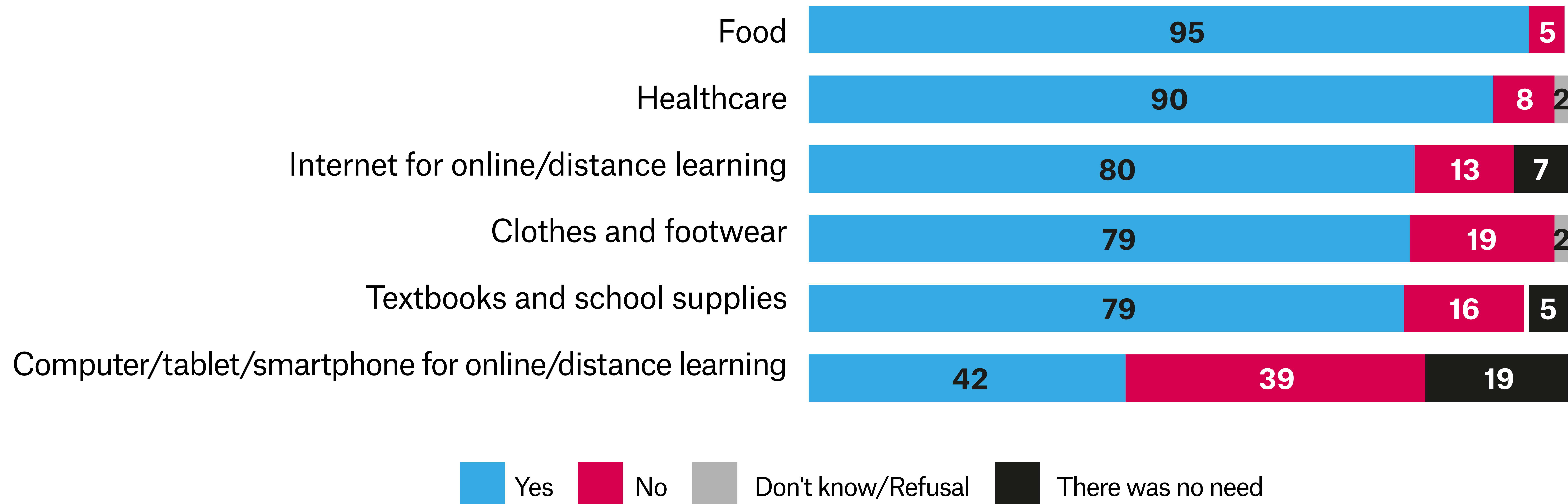


HOUSEHOLDS' ABILITY TO AFFORD PRODUCTS FOR CHILDREN AGED FROM 6 TO 18 YEARS

The vast majority of households with children aged from 6 to 18 years were able to afford food and healthcare, as well as clothes and footwear, internet needed for distance learning and textbooks and school supplies in the past six months. In addition, 39% of parents who had costs for buying devices needed for distance learning, couldn't afford them.

Data in %

Since September 2020



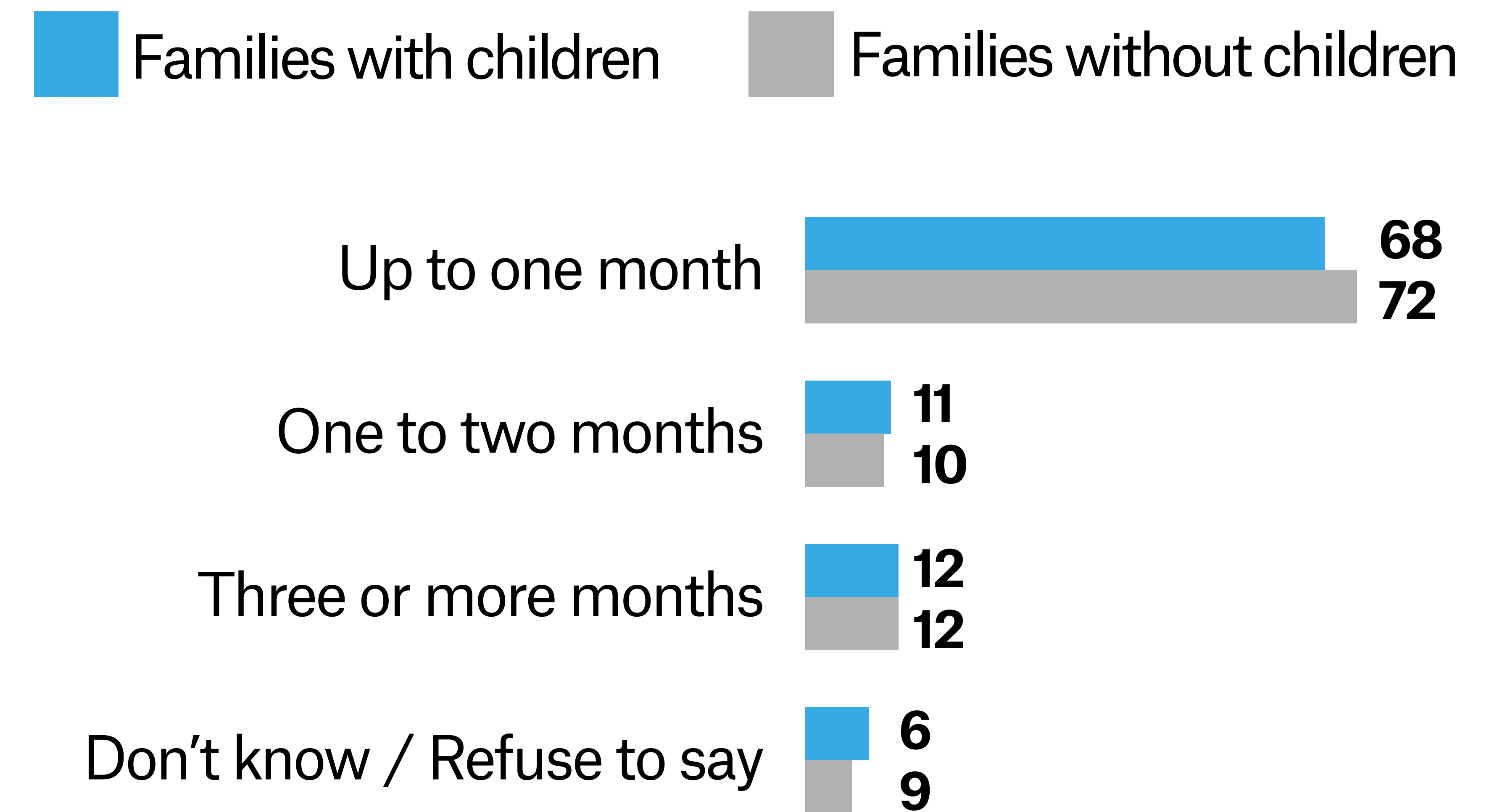
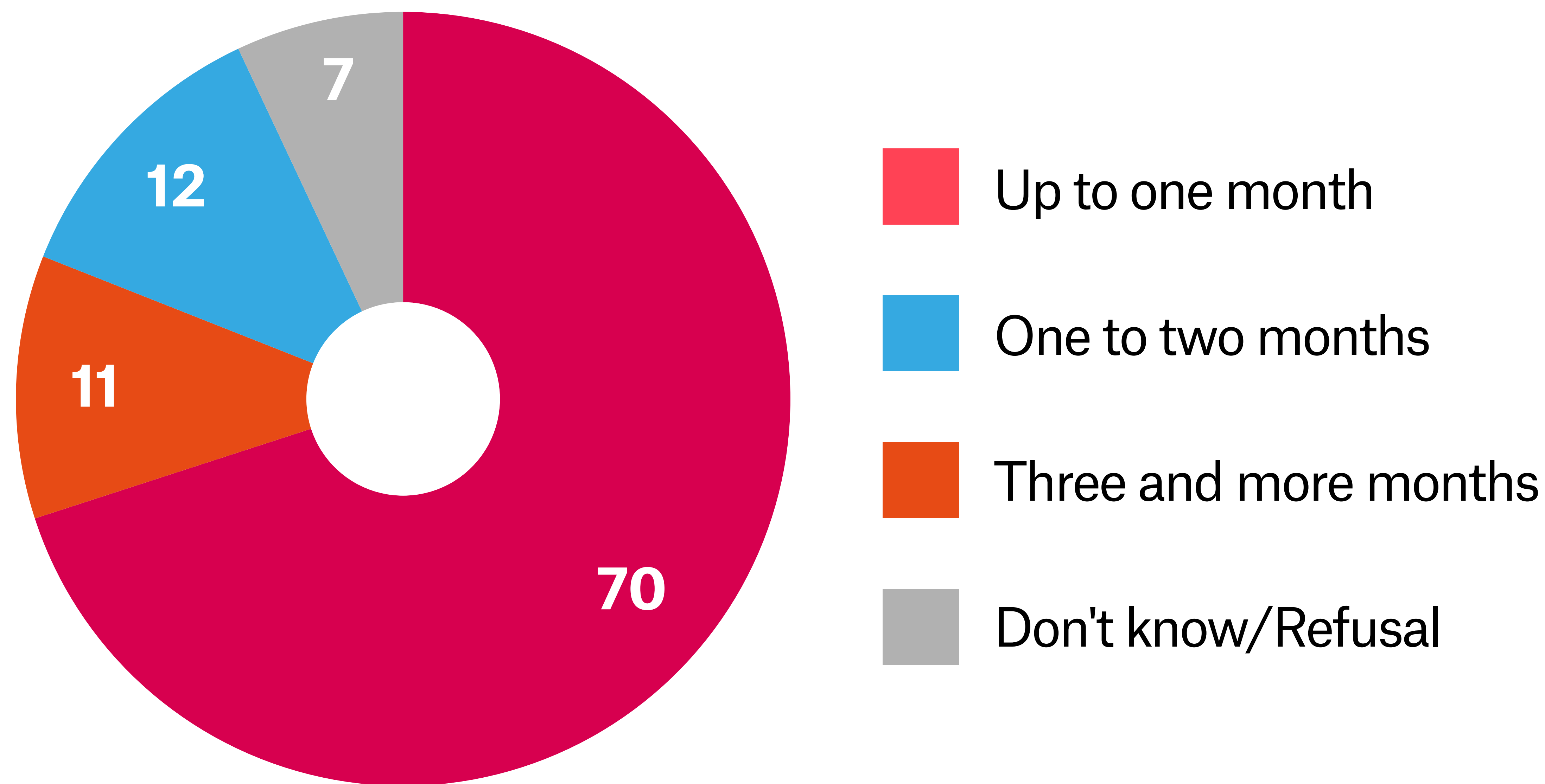
Was your household able to afford the following products for children age between 6 and 18 years in the past six months?
 Base: Those who have children aged 6 to 18 in their household, N=320



HOW LONG CITIZENS CAN MANAGE TO MEET THEIR HOUSEHOLD NEEDS WITH THE MONEY THEY HAVE AT THEIR DISPOSAL

Seven out of 10 respondents believed that they could meet their basic household needs with the current income of all household members, their savings and the supplies at their disposal for another month, 11% for one to two months, while 12% report they would be able to do so for three or more months. Those with a university education and young people aged 18–29 are more likely to report that they can meet their basic household needs for a period of one month and beyond.

Data in %



If you take into account all the household members' incomes, savings and stocks (food, goods), how long will your household be able to meet its basic needs?
Base: Total target population, N=1,063

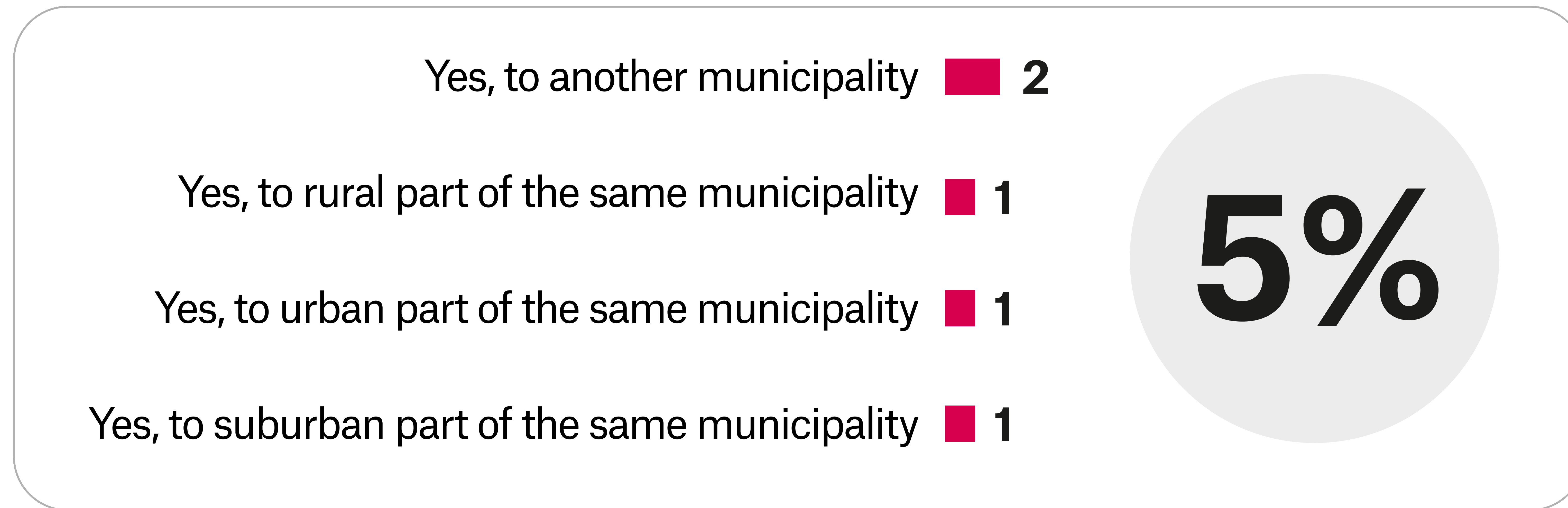
Base: Families with children under 18 years of age (44% of the total target population)
Families without children under 18 years of age (56% of the total target population)



CHANGING RESIDENCE DUE TO WORSENERD FINANCIAL SITUATION TRIGGERED BY THE PANDEMIC

A total of 5% respondents reported that their household had been forced to change their place of residence due to the deterioration of their financial situation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data in %



No  **95**

Was your household forced to change its place of residence triggered by the worsened financial situation due to the pandemic?
Base: Total target population, N=1,063



SCHOOL AND DISTANCE LEARNING

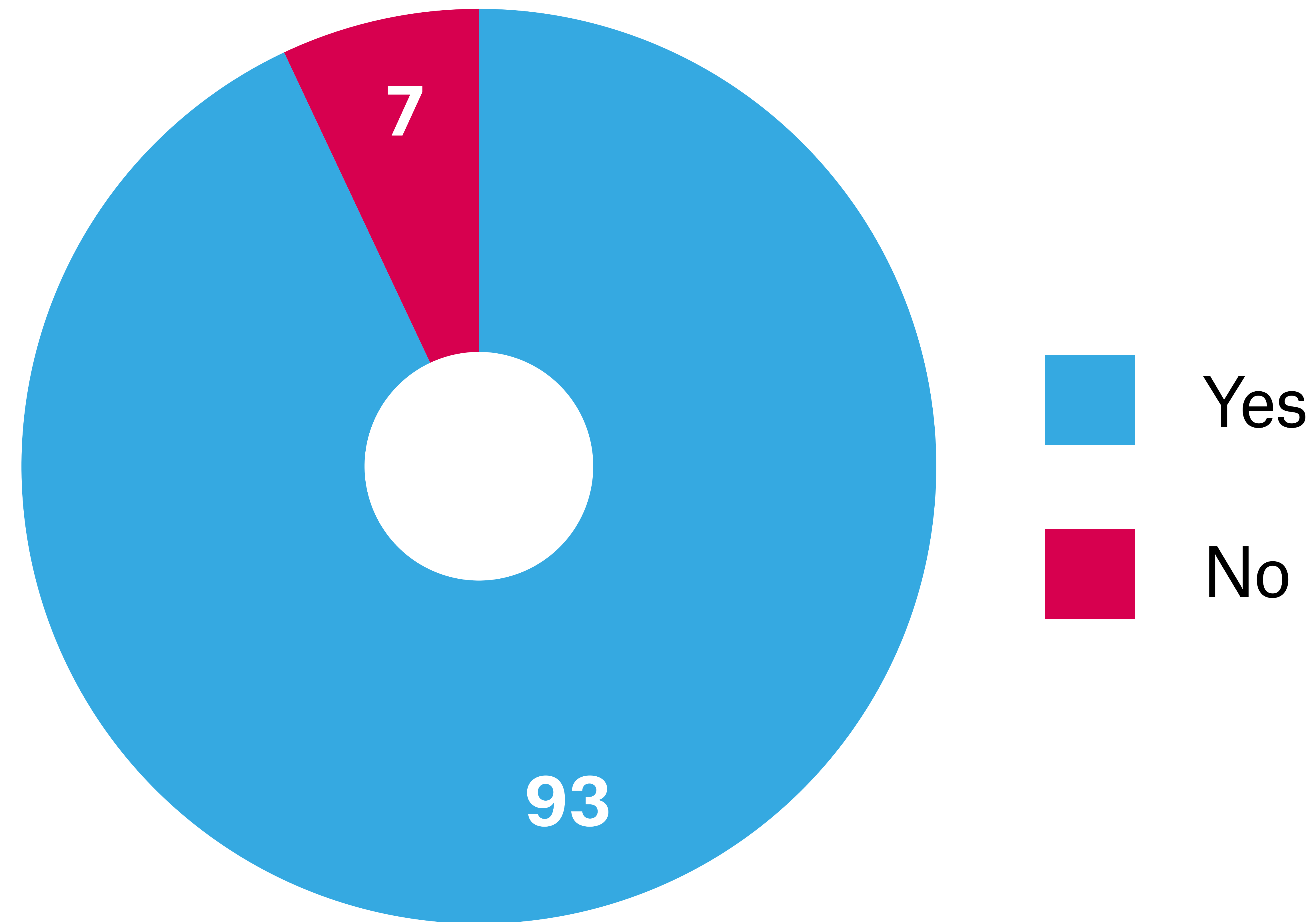




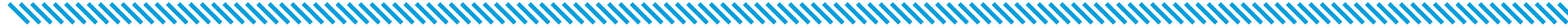
CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN DISTANCE LEARNING

A large majority of school-age children have taken part in the distance learning process.

Data in %



Has your child taken part in distance learning (on TV, YouTube, e-platforms...)?
Base: Those who have children aged 6 to 18 in their household, N=320



SATISFACTION WITH SCHOOL TEACHING IN THE CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES

Parents are mainly satisfied with the teaching aspects during the pandemic. Three quarters of parents are satisfied with their communication with teachers and class tutor, while more than half of parents are very satisfied with this aspect. Three out of 10 parents are very satisfied with quality of teaching and grading, while one quarter are very satisfied with the overall organization of teaching in school. At the same time, about one fifth of parents are not satisfied with the quality of teaching, grading and overall organization of teaching in school.

Data in %



Communication with teachers/dass master



Quality of teaching



Grading



Overall organization of teaching at school



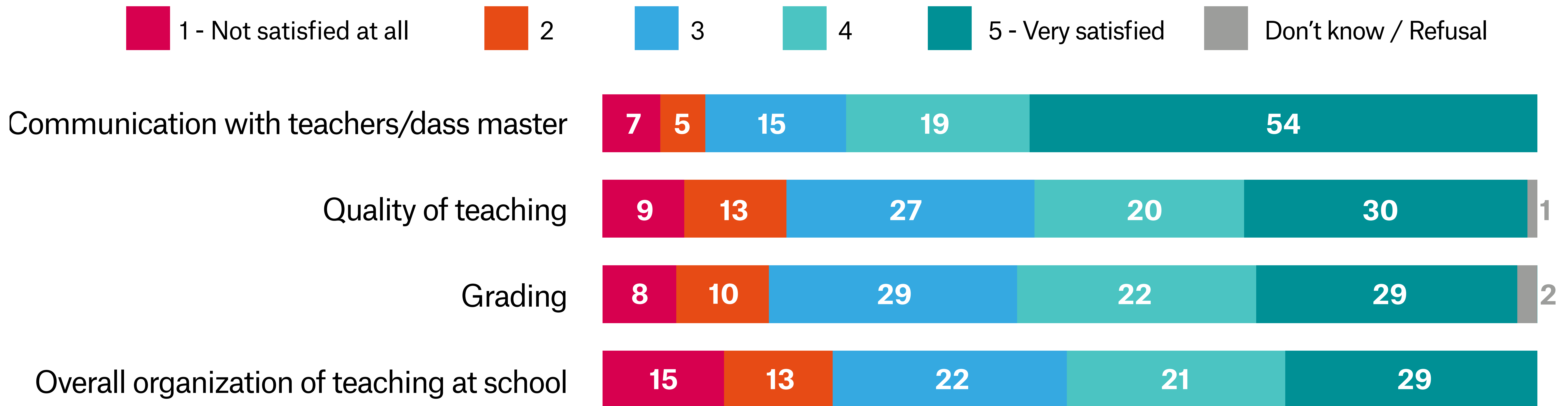
How satisfied are you with the following aspects of teaching at school in the changed circumstances (shorter classes and limited number of classes)?
Base: Those who have children aged 6 to 18 in their household, N=320



SATISFACTION WITH DISTANCE LEARNING ASPECTS

Parents of children who have used online classes are mainly satisfied with the various aspects of this kind of teaching. More than half of them are very satisfied with their communication with teachers and the class tutor, while three out of 10 parents are very satisfied with the quality of teaching, grading and overall organization of distance learning. However, more than a quarter of parents are not satisfied with the overall organization of distance learning, while one fifth are not satisfied with the quality of online teaching and almost one fifth with the grading method.

Data in %



How satisfied are you with the following distance learning aspects?
 Base: Those whose child took part in distance learning , N=298



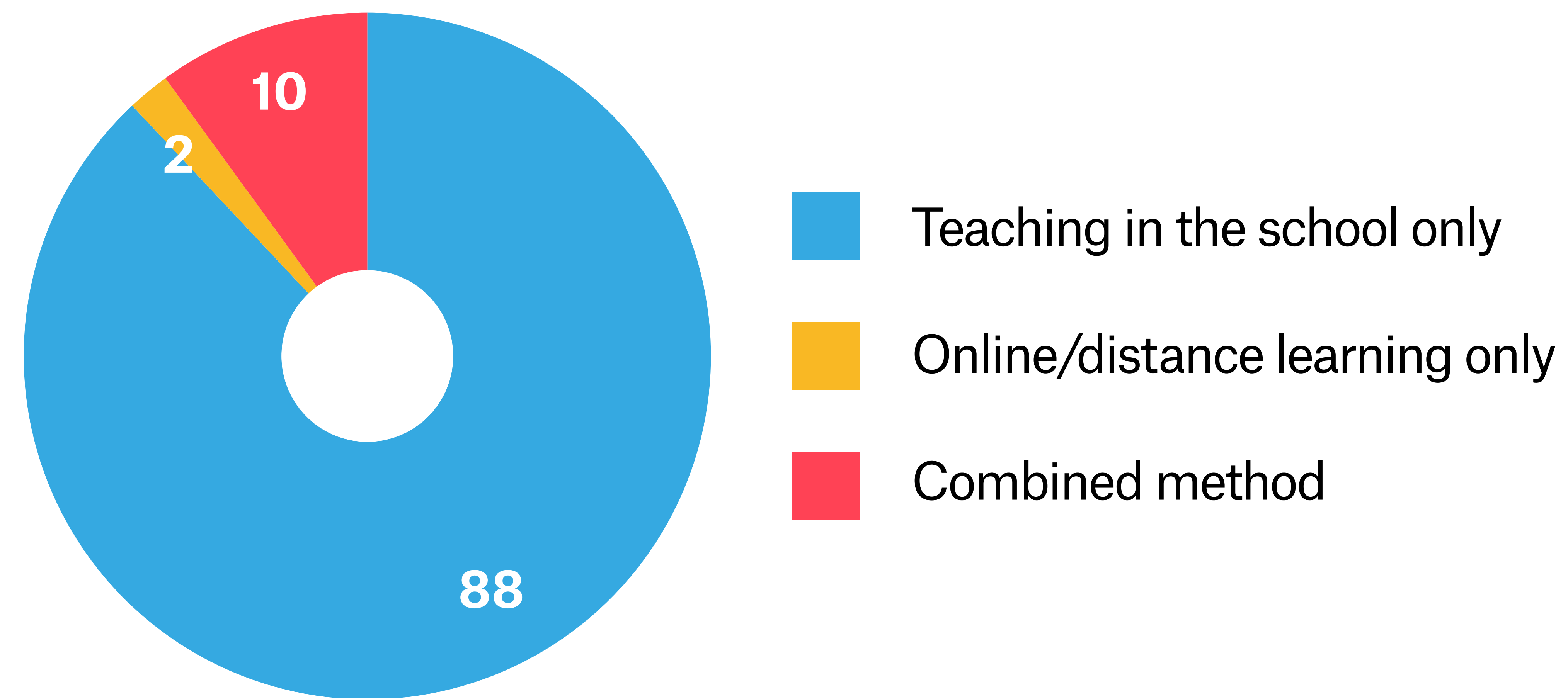
PREFERRED TEACHING METHOD

A large majority of parents with school-age children would prefer teaching to take place only in school in the next school year, while one in 10 parents prefer the combined teaching method.

More than four fifths of citizens whose children have taken part in distance learning still think that their children obtained less knowledge than they would have done in traditional school, while 12% believe that the volume of knowledge is the same.

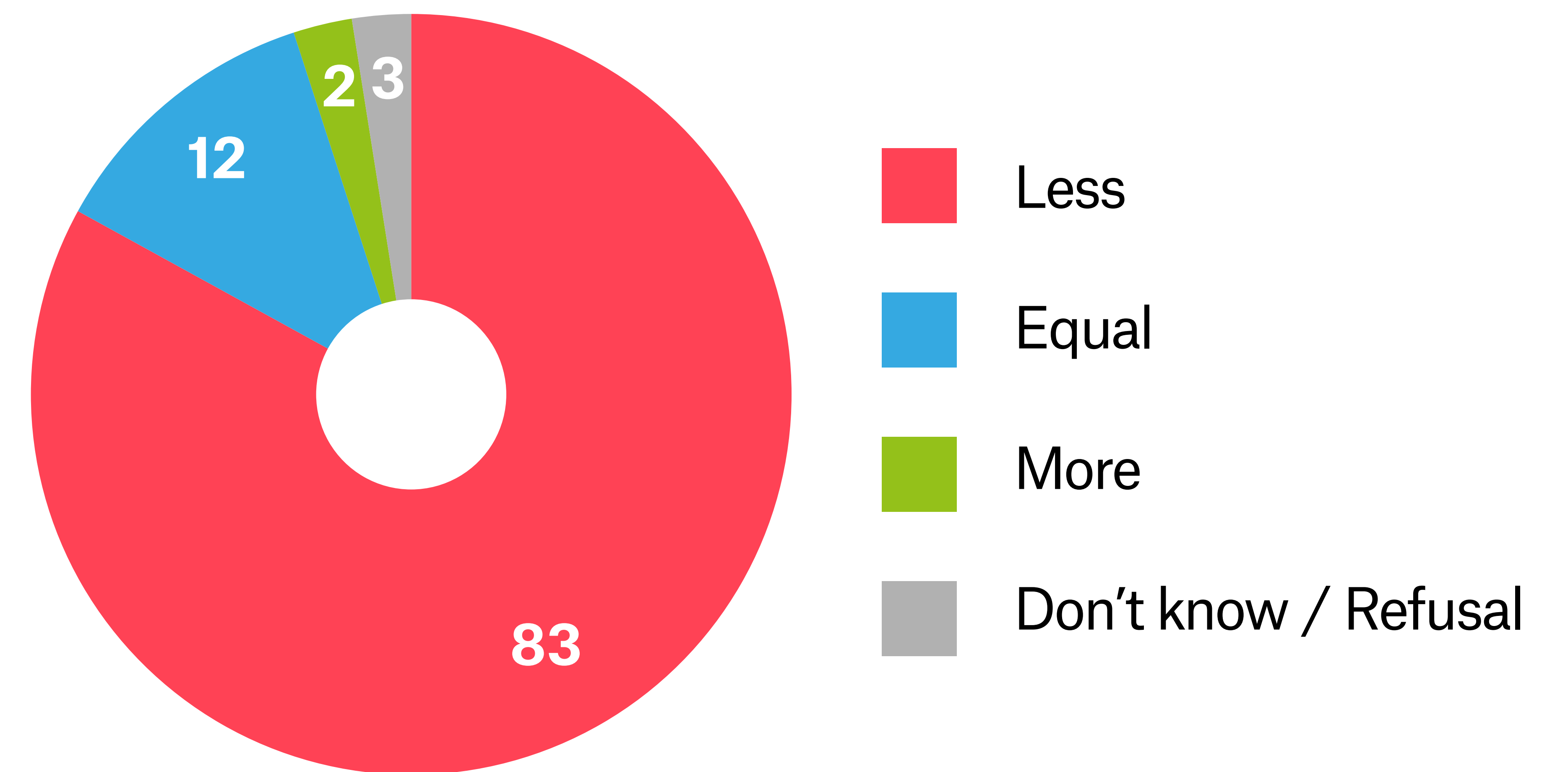
Type of teaching that parents would prefer

Data in %



Which type of teaching would you prefer for the next school year?
Base: Those whose child took part in distance learning, N=320

Assessment of the knowledge obtain via distance learning compared to traditional methods



In your opinion, did your child obtain less, more or the same amount of knowledge and skills with distance learning, when compared with traditional methods?
Base: Those whose child took part in distance learning, N=298

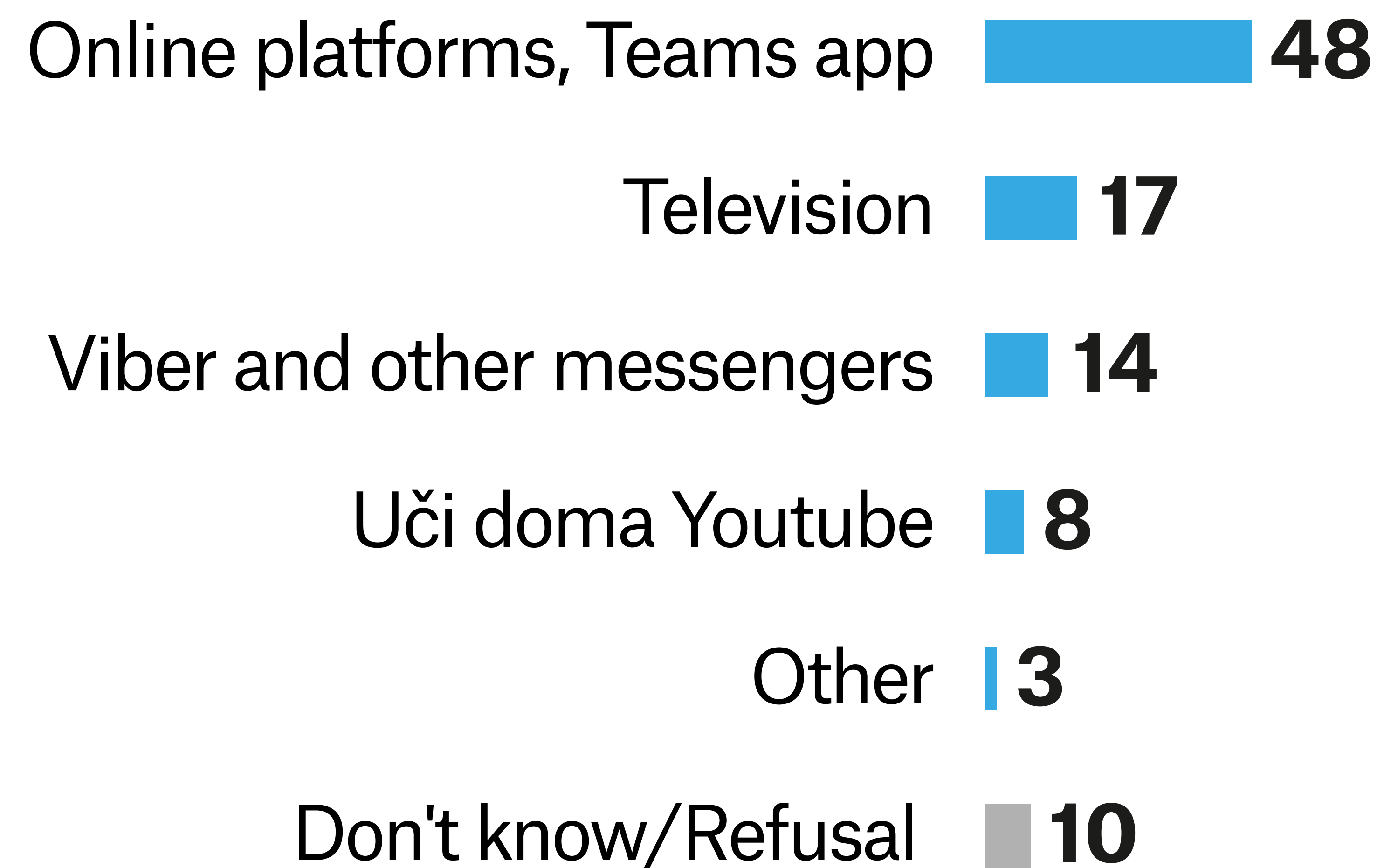


MOST EFFECTIVE FORM OF DISTANCE LEARNING

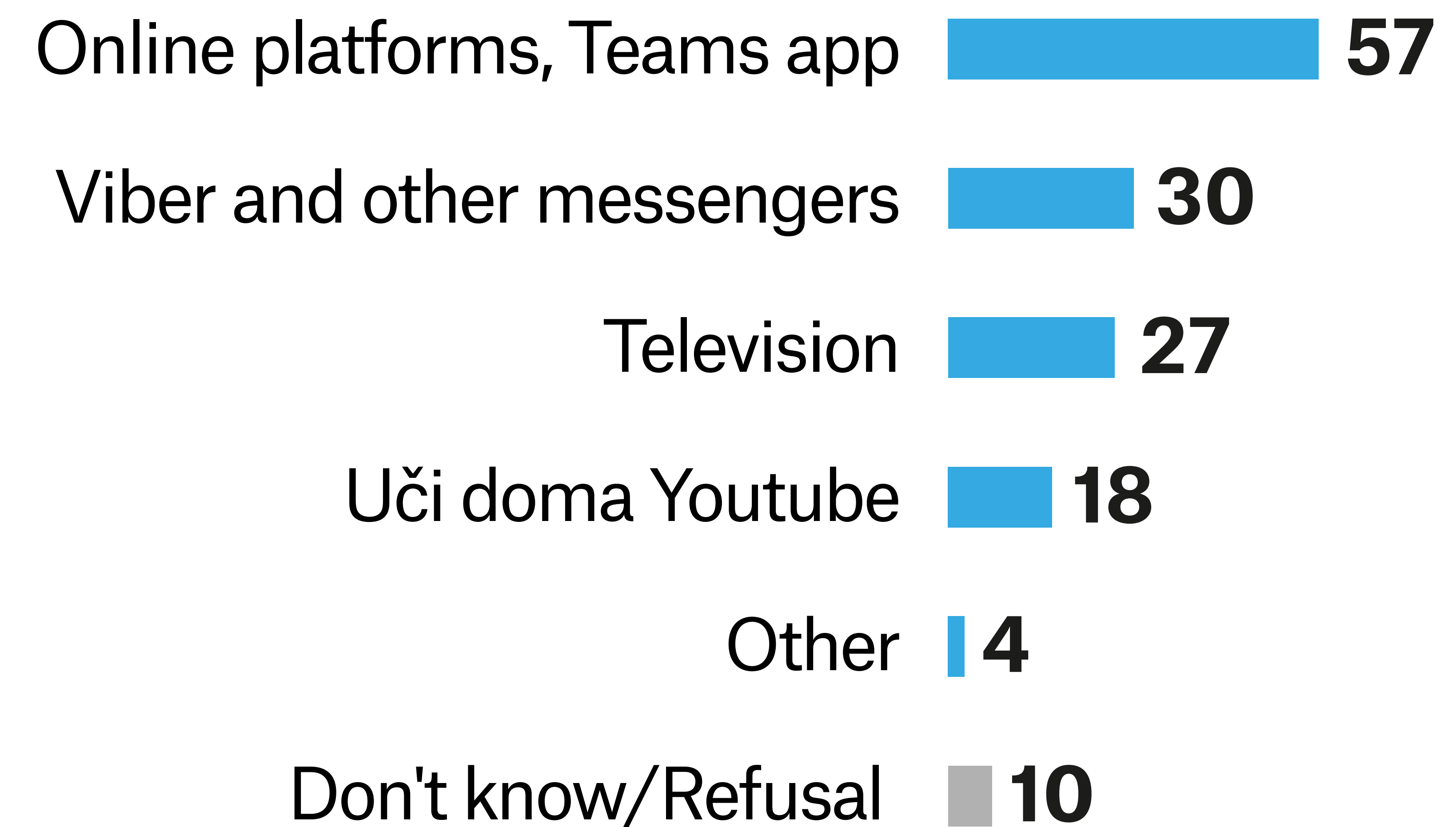
Almost three fifths of parents whose children have used distance learning believe that online platforms and the Teams app are the most effective form of distance learning in terms of obtaining knowledge and skills, followed by television. Three out of 10 parents single out Viber and other messaging apps, while 27% of parents single out television, and these are mainly residents of northern areas.

Data in %

First answer



All answers



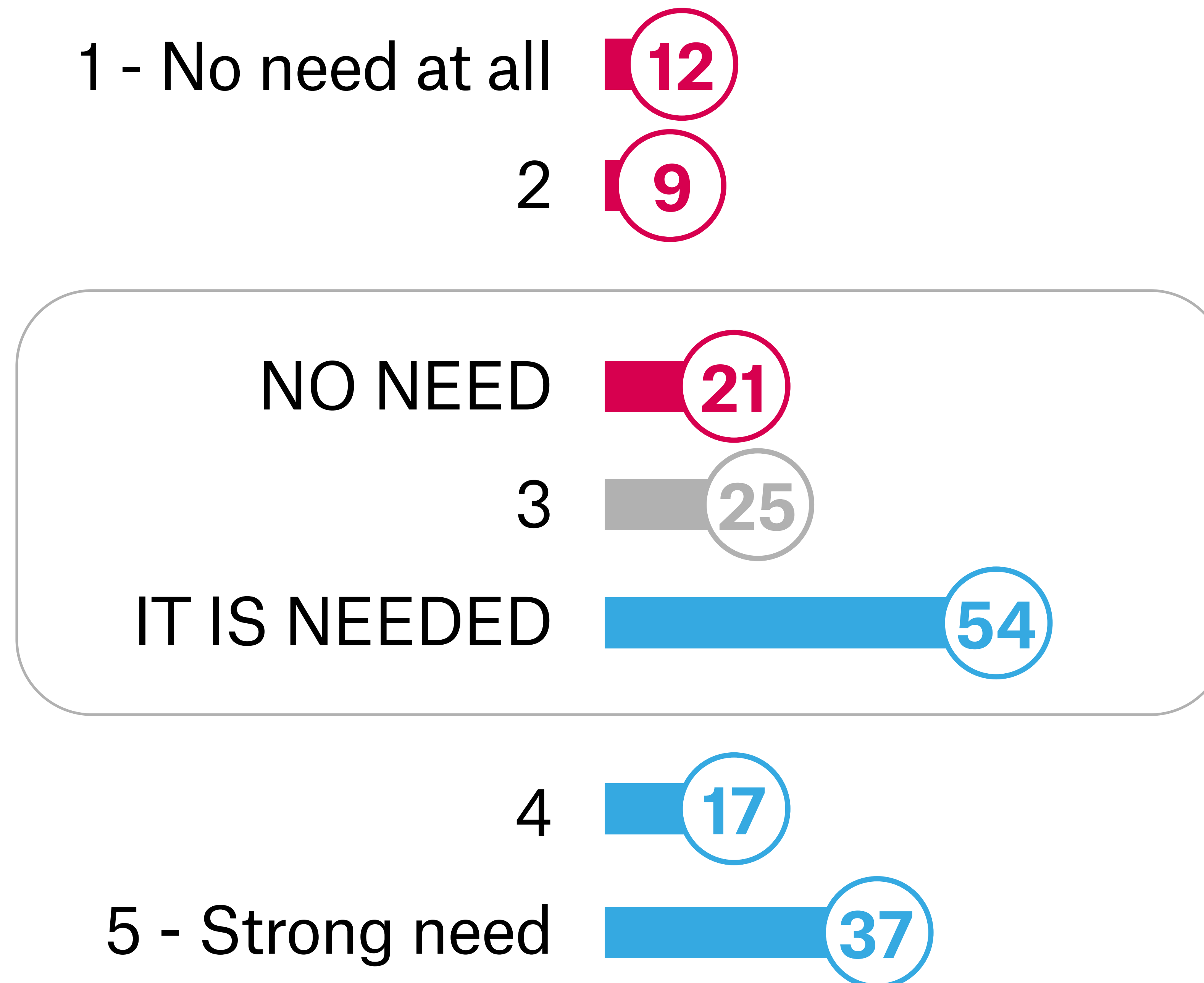


CHILD'S NEED FOR SUPPORT IN LEARNING

More than half of parents say that their child needs support with learning, while almost two fifths state that there is a strong need for this kind of support, primarily parents who live in the north of the country. On the other hand, one fifth of parents point out that their children do not need support with learning and the majority of these parents live in the south of the country.

Parents say that they are their children's greatest support in terms of learning, while support is also provided by teachers and the school and other family members. Furthermore, one fifth of parents mention that children get great support from their friends. On the other hand, children are least likely to get support through paid private lessons.

Data in %



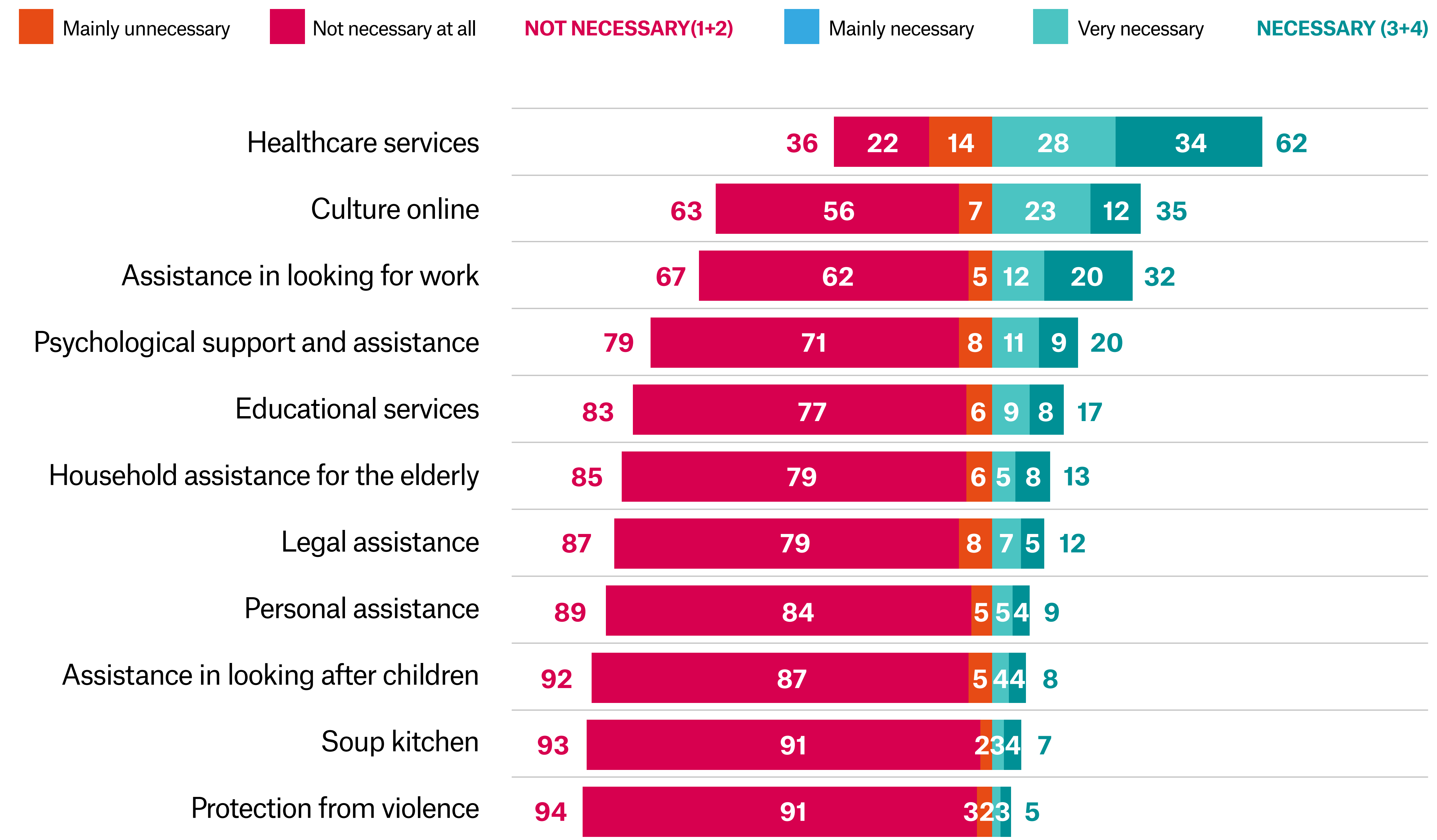
THE NEED FOR SERVICES



THE NEED FOR PUBLIC SERVICES

Montenegrin citizens report the need for health-related services the most, followed by one in three respondents reporting the need for online cultural content and assistance with looking for work. Citizens above 60 years of age are significantly more likely to single out their need for healthcare services and homecare services for seniors, while citizens with a university education tend to single out online cultural content and homecare services for children. Moreover, young people aged 18–29 are considerably more likely to mention assistance in looking for work and protection against violence, while the age group 30–44 singled out the need for educational and legal services, and homecare services for children.

Data in %



Which of the following public services do you need most?
Base: Total target population, N=1,063

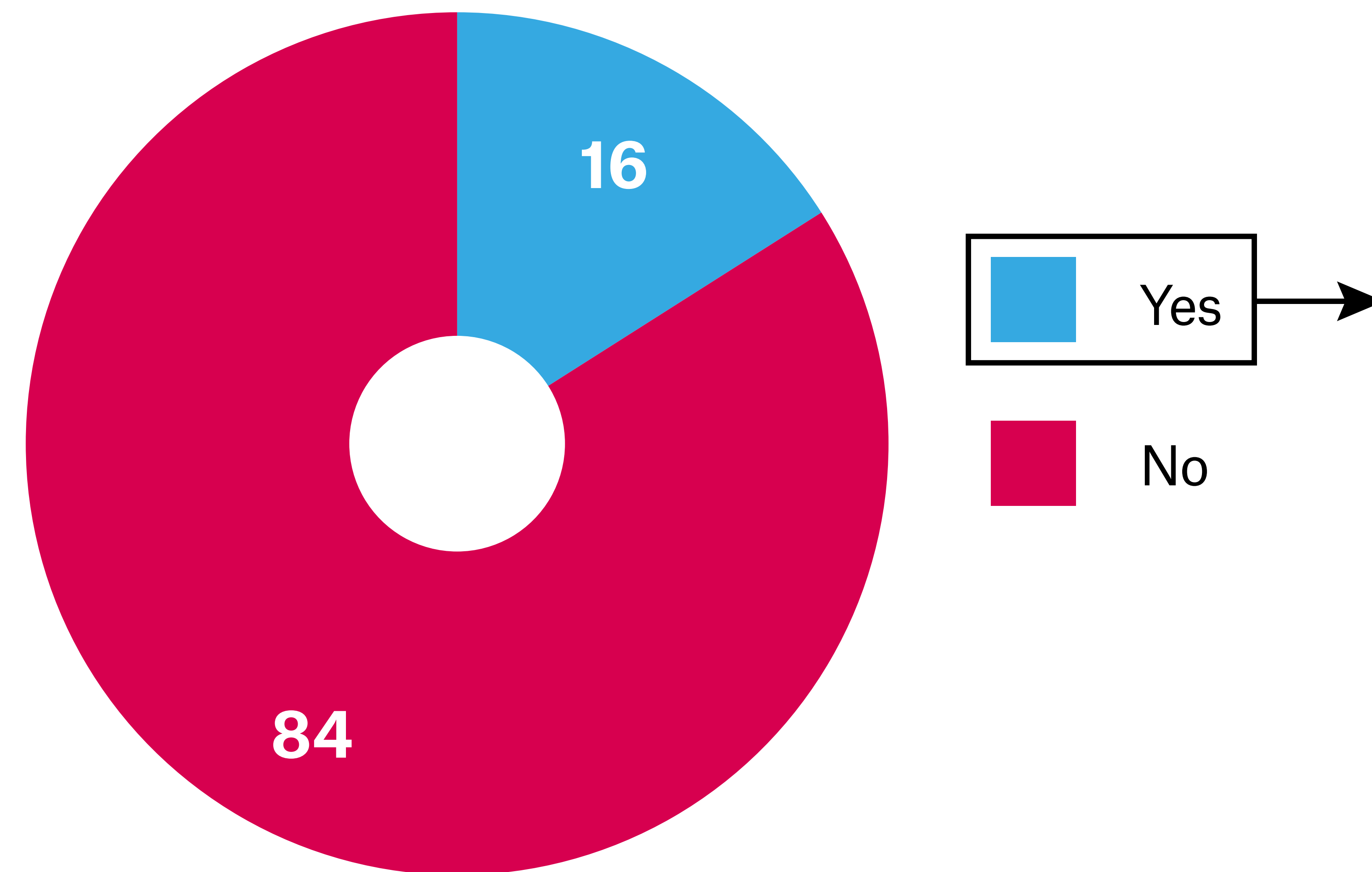


ADDRESSING SERVICE PROVIDERS FOR ASSISTANCE

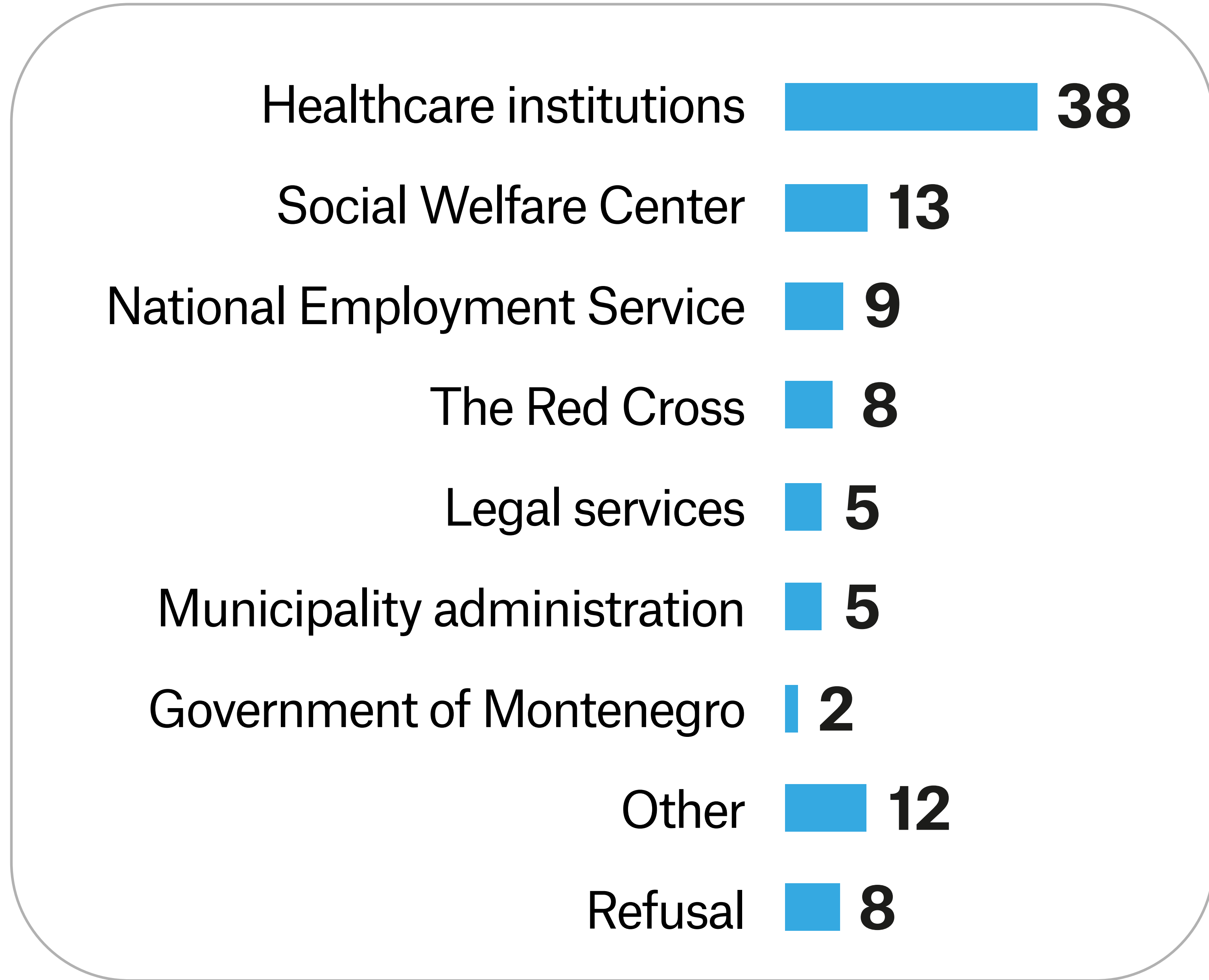
A total of 16% of respondents said that they had asked different service providers for support over the last six months, which is a considerable increase compared to the previous year’s findings, when the same was done by 9% of respondents. Citizens aged 30–44, and parents of children aged 0–6 are most likely to turn to service providers. Most of them approached healthcare institutions for assistance.

Data in %

In the past 6 months, have citizens addressed any service provider for assistance?



To whom have they addressed to?



Base: Total target population, N=1,063

Base: Those who have approached any service provider for assistance in the past six months (16% of the total target population)

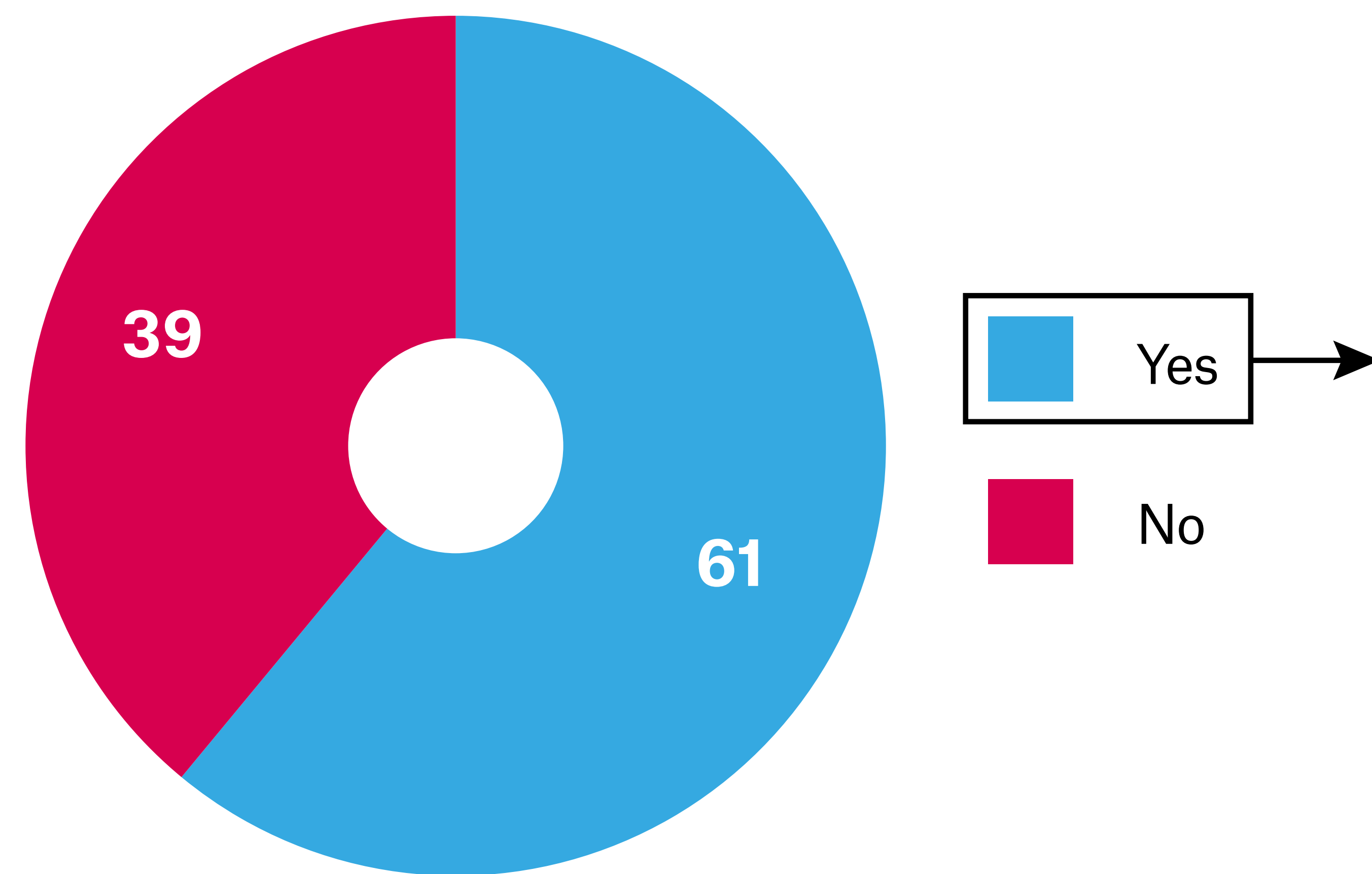


MEETING NEEDS AND SATISFACTION WITH QUALITY OF SERVICES

Three out of five citizens who approached service providers for assistance over the last six months had their needs met (since September 2020), while close to three quarters of them expressed overall satisfaction with the services rendered, and almost half were very satisfied.

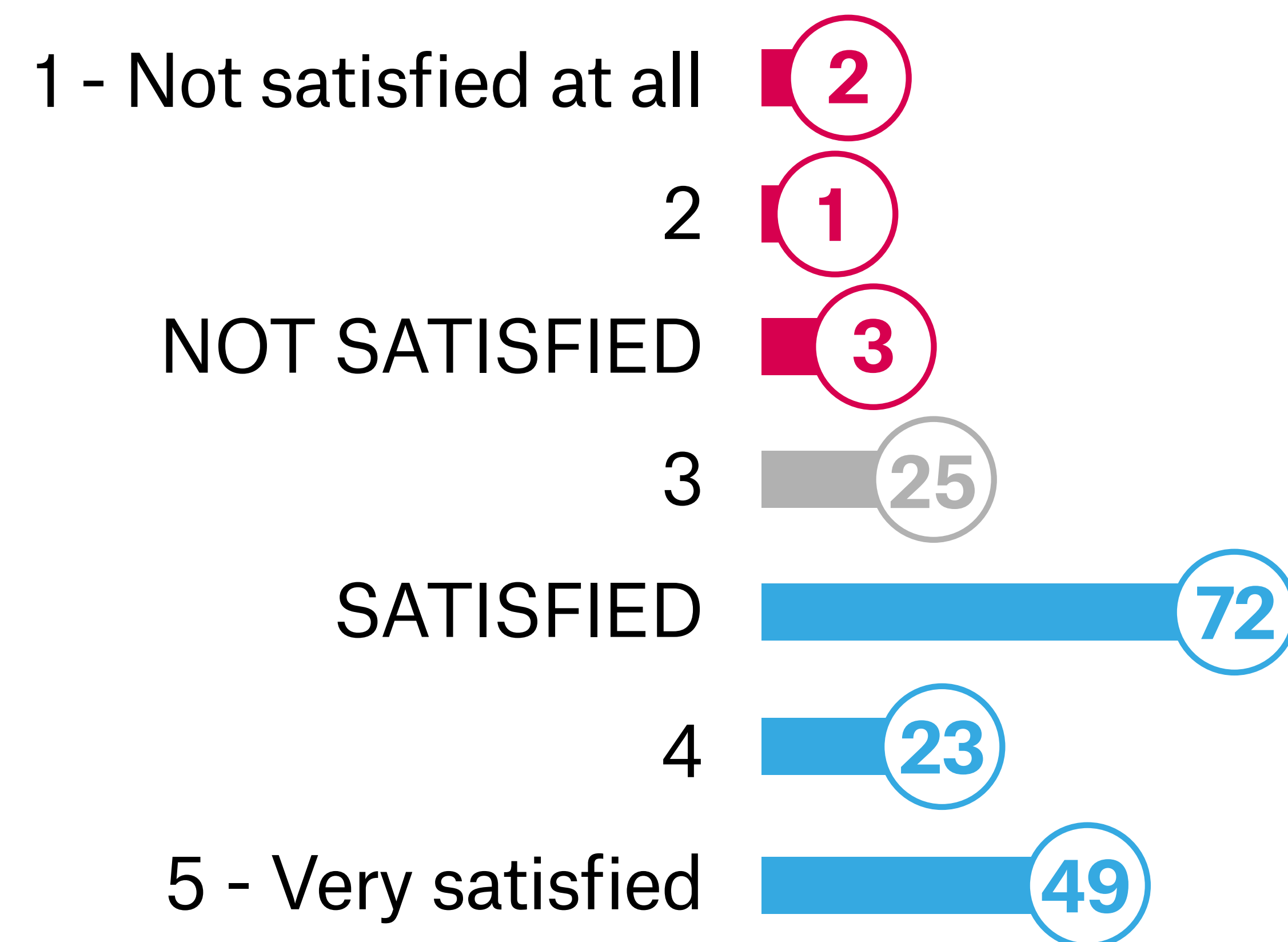
Data in %

Has your need been met?



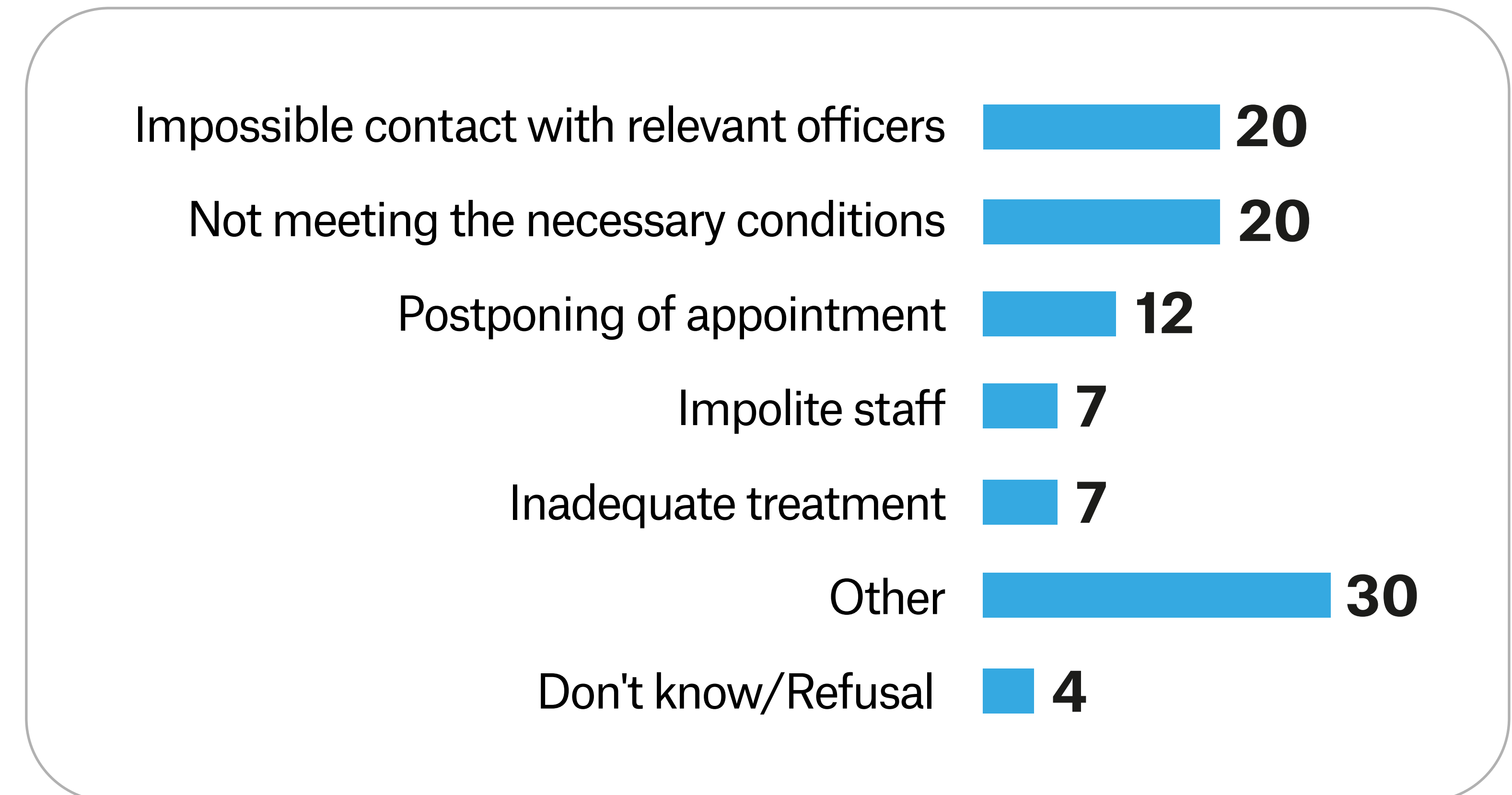
Base: Those who have addressed any service provider for assistance in the past 6 months (16% of total target population)

How satisfied are you with quality of service?



Base: Those whose needs have been met (9% of total target population)

What was the main reason why your need has not been met?



Base: Those whose need haven't been met (6% of total target population)

CONTRACTING COVID-19

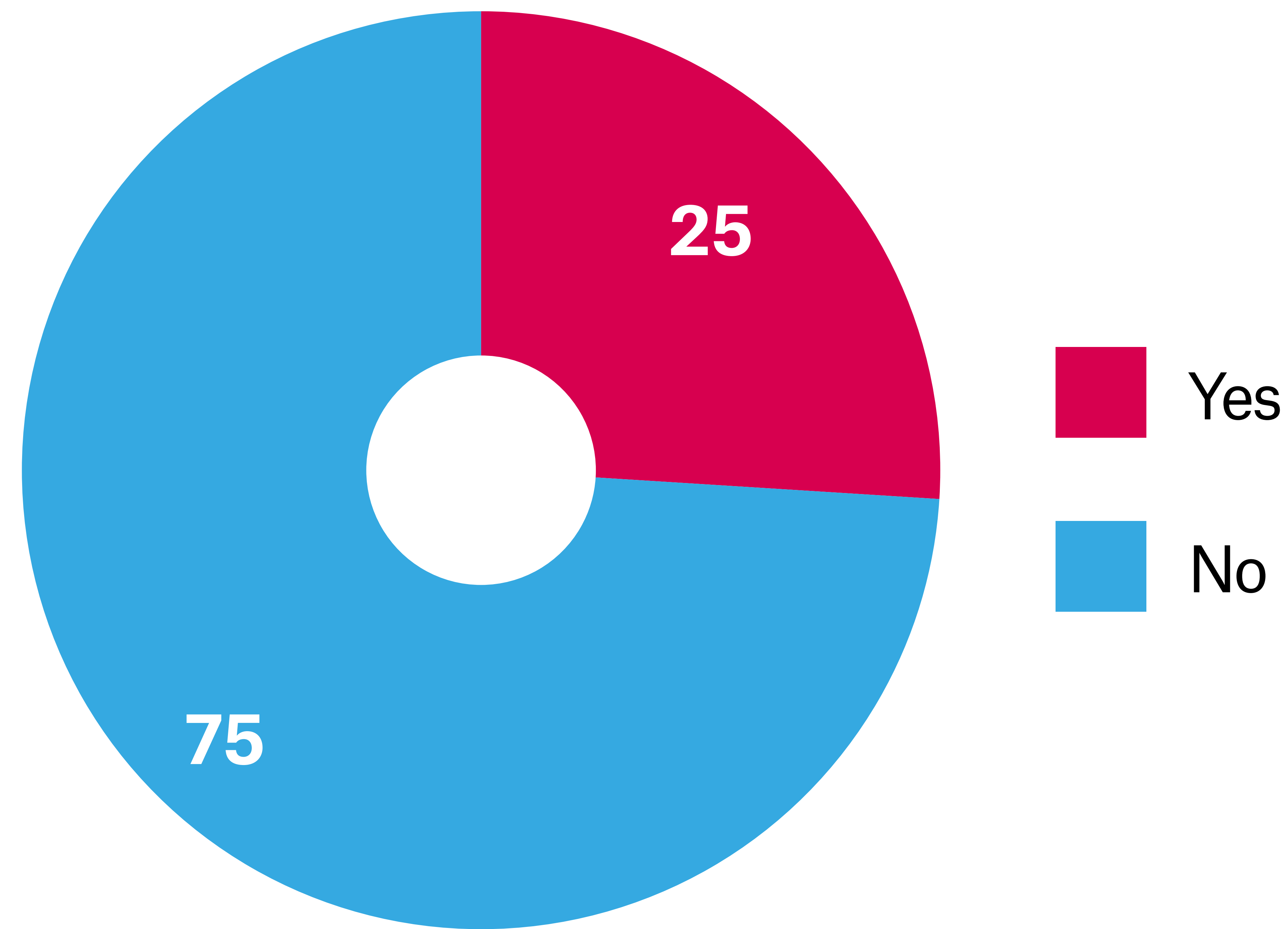


CONTRACTING COVID-19

One in four respondents reported they contracted COVID-19, primarily among the 30–44 age group.

Data in %

Have you had or do have the coronavirus?



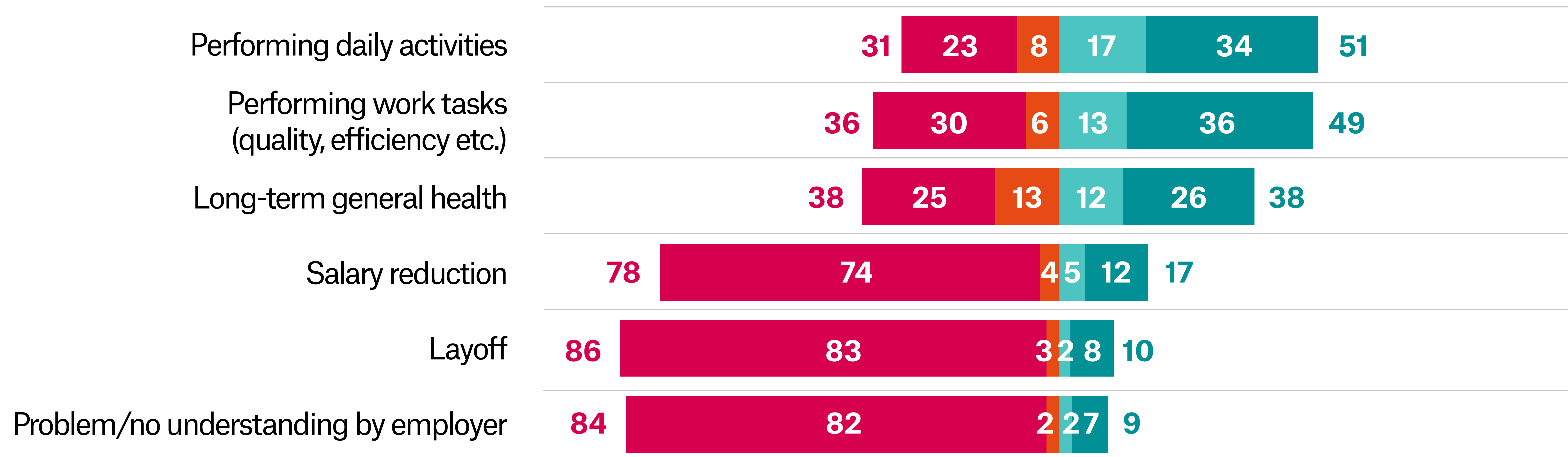
Have you had or do you have coronavirus?
Base: Total target population, N=1,063



THE CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19

Half of those who contracted COVID-19 reported that it affected their daily lives and activities, while close to two out of five report long-term, related health issues. Most citizens who contracted COVID-19 did not have problems concerning salary reduction, being laid off or any lack of understanding on the part of their employers. Among those who did encounter such problems, respondents from the southern region were more likely to report salary reduction or a lack of sympathy on the part of their employers.

Data in %



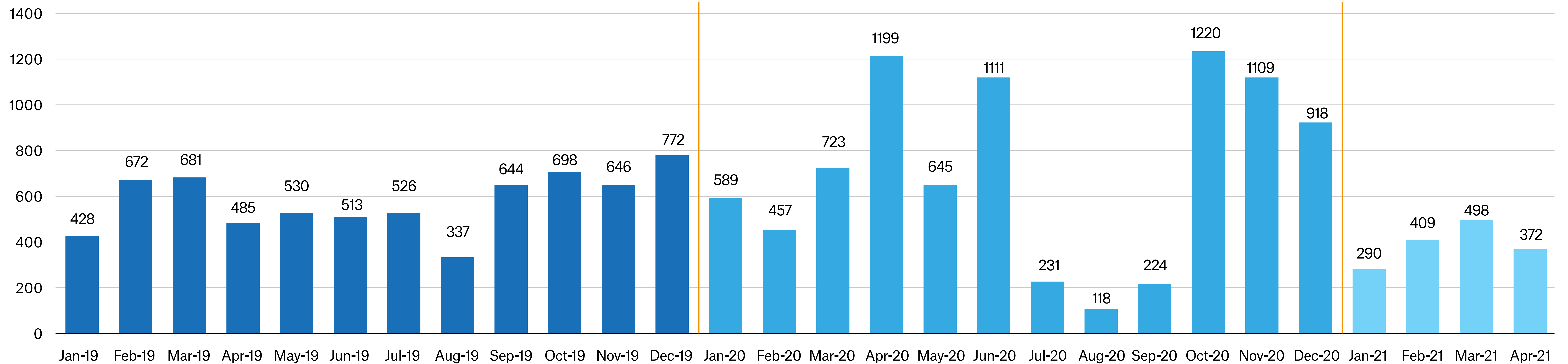
To what extent have the consequences of COVID-19 influenced the following aspects?
 Base: Those who have had or currently have coronavirus (26% of the total target population)



ADMINISTRATIVE DATA FROM THE INTEGRATED SOCIAL WELFARE INFORMATION SYSTEM



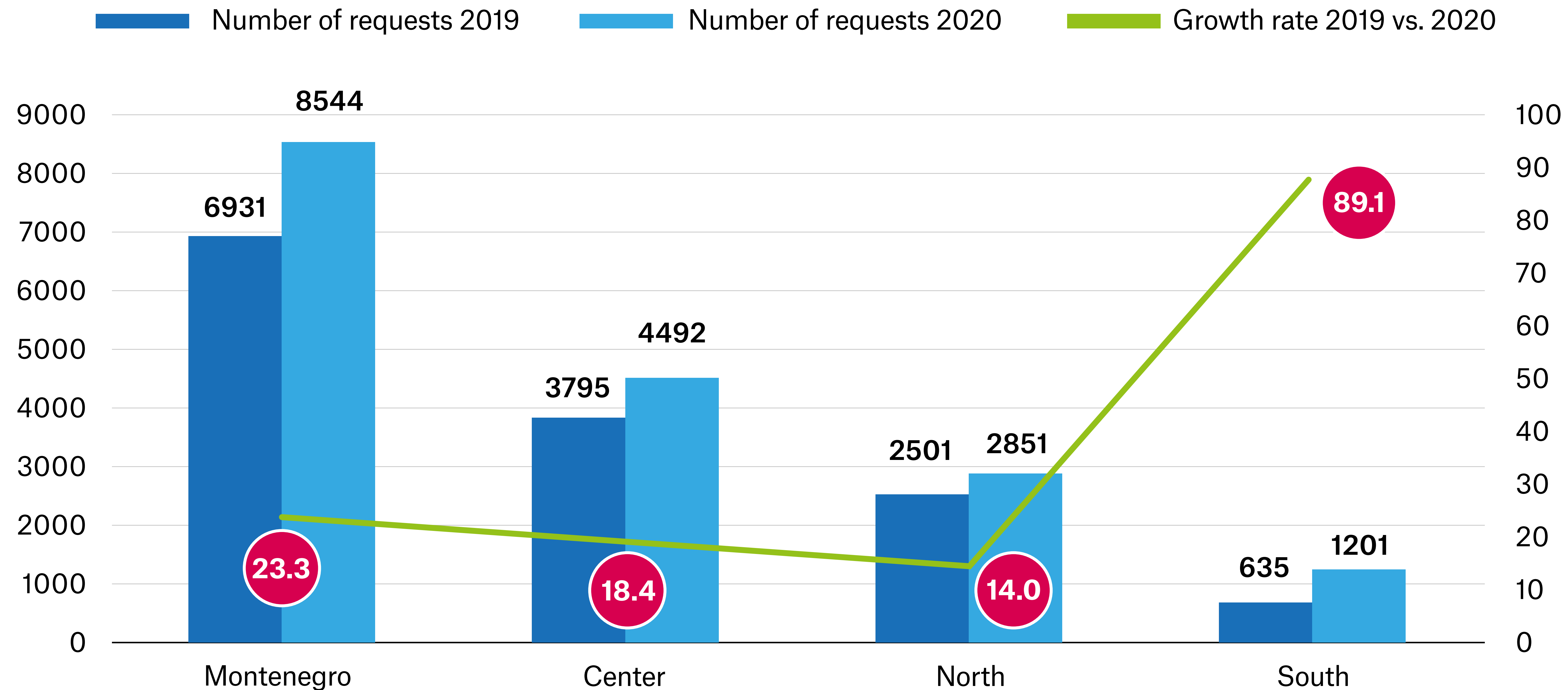
ADMINISTRATIVE DATA FROM THE INTEGRATED SOCIAL WELFARE INFORMATION SYSTEM



- **The crisis has hit those who were not covered by social protection schemes more than the existing social assistance beneficiaries.**

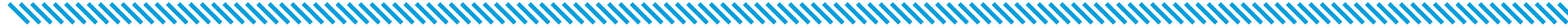
- The data shows that the vast majority of applicants (from 72.6% in March 2020 to 93.3% in April 2021) didn't belong to the category of social assistance beneficiaries at the moment of seeking one-off assistance.

ADMINISTRATIVE DATA FROM THE INTEGRATED SOCIAL WELFARE INFORMATION SYSTEM



- The number of requests is inversely correlated to regional development levels, measured by unemployment and poverty rates.
- In 2020, the largest increase in the number of requests was recorded in the southern region (89.1%), followed by the central region (18.4%), with the lowest increase in the number of requests being recorded in the least developed northern region (14.0%). **This shows that the economic crisis hit the most developed areas the hardest.**

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILDREN

- The families that are recipients of cash benefits, single-parent households, Roma families and families with a history of substance abuse have been **extremely affected by a loss of income**.
- Across all types of households with children, the primary needs pertain to **food and hygiene kits**.
- Children need **healthcare services** and **support/assistance with learning**, particularly for the distance learning modality.
- Roma children had a lot of difficulties in engaging in distance learning and need significant assistance with their homework.
- Families with children with disabilities, children in foster care and children whose parents have a history of substance abuse report the need for psychosocial support.
- The parents with a history of substance abuse, parents of children with disabilities and single parents require childcare assistance.

“She was neglected since I was unable to take care of her when I was down with COVID and she developed a fear of separation, doesn’t want to leave my side at all, and I became aware we didn’t have the money for all the things we need, which only adds to my concerns.”

46-year-old single mother from Budva



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ADOLESCENTS

- Adolescents seem to have adjusted to distance learning, **but they miss regular education**, especially its social component.
- Most adolescents have a relatively negative view of distance learning and believe that they **have not learned as much as they would have through traditional schooling**, which will reflect negatively on their further schooling.
- Most adolescents did not use television for distance learning – they preferred online tools and message-exchange services.
- Adolescents and young people believe that there is **not enough psychological support** for young people in times of pandemic.

“School is so much more than just learning.”

**18-year-old girl from
Podgorica**

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE ELDERLY

- An increase in the percentage of elderly households that need support in providing **food, hygiene products** and **medicines**.
- Due to the reduced movement and isolation which causes anxiety and fear there is an **increased need for psychosocial support** and counselling for the elderly.
- The need for medical services decreased as the pandemic lessened.
- They need health services, and home and psychological support and assistance.

"We have been locked down for over a year now, that's the worst thing that happened, we cannot go out or see our children."

**72-year-old woman
residing in a nursing
home in Risan**

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- Many persons with disabilities have seen their income partially or substantially reduced.
- Over the last six months their pressing needs referred to **sport and recreation, internet access for information purposes, followed by hygiene products, medicines and food.**
- They need **health services, psychological support, cultural content, legal services and assistance in finding employment.**
- Half of the respondents who sought public services failed to obtain access to them. Those who did get access to services are very pleased with the service quality.
- The respondents fear the health risks associated with the pandemic the most. The health risk has increased the costs they incur through the purchase of expensive vitamins, but also their levels of anxiety and apprehension.

“A psychological effect, in terms of the need to avoid close contact with your family, friends, etc. Also poor mobility and restrictions on movement were significant changes for me.”

**28-year-old woman from
Podgorica**



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON VICTIMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- The number of GBV victims placed in shelters in 2020 did not increase, while **the number of calls grew by 15%**.
- Specialized service providers for victims of GBV **report worsening of the socio-economic situation of women and an increase in requests for food and financial assistance** by former users of their services which was caused by a loss of work or income.
- To date there is only one specialized service for victims of GBV integrated into the system and partly funded from the central budget – the national helpline.
- **Reduced multi-sector and multidisciplinary cooperation** could be noticed during the whole time the physical distancing measures were enforced.
- The victims of GBV were put into the position of having to make a **hard decision between protecting their safety and protecting their livelihood/income**, since the conditions of the system set up pre-COVID-19 do not allow them to reconcile the two.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILD VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

- There is an **increase in violent incidents**, as well as the change in their nature, as psychological violence including arguments between spouses/partners, but also between parents and children, particularly adolescents, have become more prominent.

“Adjournments of court hearings in divorce, custody and division of marital assets proceedings were quite frequent, particularly during the first pandemic wave. This has affected the financial standing of mothers with dependent children, given that over this period their former partners would not pay alimony due to the lack of a statutory obligation to do so. At the same time, mothers with minor children are unable to exercise access to cash benefits with divorce and custody proceedings still pending. In addition, during the pandemic, victims have frequently been left jobless, leaving a substantial share of our service users with children living on the verge of poverty. Women with dependent children need to be provided cash benefits the moment they instigate divorce proceedings, given that it can take up to a year and during that time women frequently have no income whatsoever.”

NGO activist

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DOMICILE ROMA

- The majority of respondents have either completely **lost their** income or are receiving a **significantly reduced income**.
- Reportedly, the pandemic has turned their poverty into **extreme poverty**.
- The people in this community urgently need **food, hygiene products** and **medicines**.
- **Distance learning constitutes a huge problem**, due to both the lack of technical means to engage in distance learning (computers, internet access, appropriate space) and the fact that parents lack knowledge to help their children with learning.

“Very badly, we stopped education because it was remote. The children did not follow the teaching because they did not have the means. We don’t even have a mobile phone.”

**30-year-old man from
Podgorica**

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND STATELESS PERSONS (AT RISK OF STATELESSNESS)

- A large proportion of refugees, asylum seekers and persons at risk of statelessness are **still jobless and without any opportunity to generate income.**
- **Food and hygiene kits** remain the most pressing needs of refugees from the former Yugoslavia and persons at risk of statelessness, while **food, accommodation and assistance with distance learning** are the pressing needs of asylum seekers living in privately rented accommodation and persons granted refugee status.
- The survey reveals that serious **challenges among the Roma and Egyptian refugee communities in following distance-learning programmes still persist, thus leaving them further behind education-wise.**

"I am a single mother with four children. I am not eligible for social assistance, so I have been buying food on credit from the nearby shop. The owner does not trust me anymore and it is hard to find someone to borrow money from. The assistance from the Red Cross is insufficient, and my children have no means of following online classes."

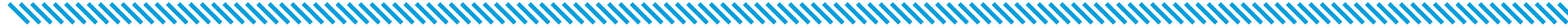
40-year-old woman at risk of statelessness from Podgorica

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MIGRANTS

- **Hygiene products** and **medicines** are their priority needs, as well as **accommodation, sport** and **recreation**.
- The public services they need most at the moment are primarily health services, assistance in finding a job and psychological assistance.
- Many migrants – particularly low-skilled migrant workers – live in **overcrowded and poor housing** where the risk of contagion is greater.
- Those who are working on construction sites are facing an increased risk of being exposed to the virus. Migrants with an irregular status may not wish to divulge the fact that they are unwell, increasing the risk of contagion.
- With limited or no access to a new labour force, there is also a risk of employers abusing workers' rights, particularly restricting their movement and ability to return to their country of origin.

"I can't wait to see my children back in Sjenica."

52-year-old construction worker in Budva, a foreigner staying on a temporary residence permit



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PEOPLE IN DETENTION, INCLUDING CHILDREN IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

- Prevention of the possible spread of the virus improved compared to the 2020 reports, thanks to a **higher availability of personal protective equipment, immunization** of police officers and inmates, and **improved conditions** in several police custody facilities across the country.
- Although the total prison population decreased, **overcrowding** remains one of the major risk factors for the spread of the virus in the investigative prison.
- Restriction of prison visits result in less psychosocial family support for inmates, which impacts negatively, especially on children.
- Thanks to a new IT laboratory at the Ljubović Centre, now all children can engage in distance learning, although the centre still remains short of staff who are able to provide assistance with learning.
- The Ljubović Centre has insufficient hygiene products.



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE LGBTI COMMUNITY

- Almost half of those LGBTI persons who took part in the assessment have lost all or more than 50% of their income over the last six months.
- More than half of the respondents are concerned about their **economic prospects** and whether they will be able to provide for their families. Their most pressing current need refers to having **adequate shelter**.
- As was the case in 2020, **psychosocial support** is the most pressing need for the LGBTI community. Over the previous period, LGBTI rights and outreach organizations received some short-term donor funding, but this is not enough in the long run.
- There is a concern about the privacy and potential future use of data on members of the community that was shared with the authorities for the purpose of receiving COVID-19 related food assistance.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DISADVANTAGED PERSONS WHO ARE NOT SOCIAL ASSISTANCE BENEFICIARIES

- Unemployment has been on the rise over the last year, particularly affecting multi-member families not benefitting from any kind of social assistance.
- The largest share of respondents from this group are **unable to access social benefits through CSWs due to their failure to meet the strict means-test criteria.**
- The bulk of people from this group have **lost all or almost all of their income.** Their most pressing needs refer to **food**, followed by **hygiene products, clothes, medicines and devices for distance learning.**
- Assistance in **finding a job** is the main priority in terms of public services for this group.

“We lost our jobs and income, we rent our flat, the debts keep piling up, psychologically insupportable, electricity supply cut off.”

**31-year-old woman,
Podgorica**



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON TENANTS

- Many people in this category lost their job during the pandemic, with a corresponding significant or partial reduction of their income.
- That is why **finding a job** is mentioned as one of the most pressing needs of tenants. They also need legal services and childcare.
- Most respondents from this group have **not attempted to access any of the services**, and among those who did, health care and childcare are the most frequently sought services.
- Current pressing needs for this group of people are **accommodation, food, medicines, devices for distance learning** and **hygiene products**.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS



GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

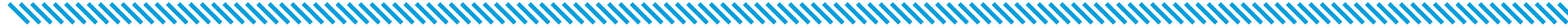
- Continue monitoring the socio-economic situation of vulnerable groups to plan and implement tailor-made and effective interventions towards their protection.
- Intensify efforts to ensure the constant availability and accessibility of public services for all citizens in general and for vulnerable groups in particular.
- During the post-COVID-19 recovery, intensify the existing active labour market measures and introduce new ones that are well-targeted to ensure employment or support for self-employment for those who have lost their jobs and income during the pandemic, including young people (seasonal employment, internship and apprenticeship).
- Ensure direct involvement of vulnerable groups in designing policies and measures pertaining to them.
- Provide continuous and tailored information to citizens, especially members of vulnerable groups, about the social services that are available for mitigating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, about their rights and other relevant facts that affect them.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS



CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- Protect children from poverty and social exclusion through targeted, vigorous social and child protection system responses that integrate cash assistance and quality, inclusive services based on the recognized needs of each child in contact with the system. In most critical cases, ensure ad-hoc support with food provisioning and basic supplies until the situation has stabilized.
- Ensure that children, including refugee children, can grow up in safe, loving environments by strengthening alternative care for children without parental care, victims of family violence, or other vulnerable children. To do so, kinship and non-kinship foster care, including emergency and specialized foster care for children with disabilities, should be further strengthened.
- Maintain and expand psychological support to children and adolescents through helplines and within the framework of public services (schools, primary healthcare centres).
- Ensure support for the parents and caregivers of children with disabilities, especially single parents/caregivers.
- Ensure quality inclusive education for adolescents, including efforts to reach those who have no access to digital technologies and who are not digitally connected, and strengthen skill-and resilience-building programmes.
- Continue efforts aimed at increasing the quality and standardization of the distance-learning services, including careful balancing of students' workloads so that the system is ready to provide high-quality education to adolescents. Include more teachers in assisting students in achieving results.
- Children need assistance with learning to make up for what was lost due to the COVID-19 crisis. In addition, invest efforts to enable classroom instruction to the maximum extent possible.
- Ensure that children have unobstructed access to healthcare services.
- Step up the existing resilience-building programmes and indicate the need to develop innovative curricula that build those skills that are in demand in the labour market.
- Step up efforts to support young people's employability, with a focus on career guidance services, including internship and apprenticeship opportunities, for both young people and adolescents, to prevent a "lost generation" due to COVID-19.
- Increase the number of services offered and upgrade the quality of the existing services for children and adolescents to ensure support for mental health preservation and improvement.



THE ELDERLY

- Extend the distribution of food, hygiene products, and other necessary supplies and medicines, organized in line with all the medical requirements in order to limit the risk of exposure for the most vulnerable elderly persons.
- Continue to encourage and train the elderly to use new technologies and available ICT communication tools (Viber, WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom, etc.), as well as provide professional counselling to make them better-prepared for possible new pandemic waves.
- Continue the information campaign on the significance of COVID-19 immunization and raise awareness of its social and health-related aspects.



PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- Enhance health service quality and the protocols for the treatment of persons with disabilities to mitigate any additional adverse impact on their health during the COVID-19 crisis, and prevent persons with disabilities from being denied the most basic healthcare services. Develop inclusive social protection and tailored poverty reduction measures, and ensure their adequate and continuous financing, to mitigate the adverse social impacts and the risk of marginalization during the crisis.
- Establish a national institutional framework for cooperation between the state and persons with disabilities in the form of a counselling body for promoting the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities in adopting containment measures, in particular the adoption of protection and (inclusive) recovery measures. The government should develop a recovery strategy with tailor-made support for persons with disabilities and their families, accompanied by increased financial support at both the local and national levels. Such measures need to reflect a full range of disabilities and address the lack of comprehensive understanding of disability that limits access to existing forms of support, leaving many persons with unrecognized forms of impairments/disability without any support due to discriminatory provisions in the current policies that the government relies on in designing the measures.
- Financial support should include paid leave for persons with disabilities and members of their families, increased amounts of disability benefit, support to organizations of persons with disabilities to ensure occupational health and safety is enforced (face masks, disinfectants, well-organized priority immunization), but also other cash assistance, including covering any additional costs incurred due to disability. The application process for any type of support needs to be easily accessible and free-of-charge, and the applications should be handled swiftly and in a timely manner.
- Develop programmes and support measures in reference to rehabilitation and upskilling towards greater employability, personal development and self-employment capacities, as well as competencies needed in present-day society (including IT and digital transformation). Finally, all general economic recovery programmes need to include persons with disabilities.



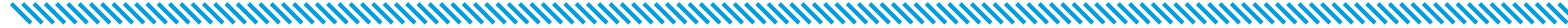
VICTIMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- Implement awareness-raising activities aimed at the public on the subject of GBV and empower women to report GBV even in the situation of the COVID-19 crisis. Ensure that community outreach and communication include information on the risk of increased domestic violence, and on the risk of sexual exploitation against children, and on the available support services. It is particularly important to reach out to victims of violence living in isolation with abusive partners.
- Ensure equal representation of men and women in decision-making bodies, and the involvement of gender, sexual and reproductive health and GBV experts.
- Services such as helplines, crisis centres and shelters need to be sufficiently financially supported during the pandemic and subsequent economic recovery. Additionally explore new technologies that could support fighting gender-based violence. Consider the provision of legal and psychological support, having in mind gender differences when it comes to access to technology.
- Establish close cooperation and communication between existing formal and informal groups, such as women's rights groups, CSOs and women's organizations, to support their efforts in providing an urgent response and prevent social exclusion.
- Introduce socio-economic measures for the victims of all forms of violence, having in mind the particularities of their vulnerabilities and situation. Pay special attention to the victims of sexual violence, including the introduction of measures that would guarantee job security during the period of their stay in a shelter.



DOMICILE ROMA

- Increase coverage by soup kitchen services to include all Roma and Egyptian families with a monthly income of under €150.
- Explore coverage by digital devices in families with school-age children and equip schools attended by Roma and Egyptian children with devices required for distance learning.
- Introduce employment and literacy/adult education programmes, accompanied by support and motivation workshops, while sensitizing employers against discrimination in parallel.



REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS AND PERSONS AT RISK OF STATELESSNESS

- Ensure the inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons/persons at risk of statelessness in all socio-economic measures to alleviate the impacts of the mitigation measures adopted to counteract the spread of COVID-19 and re-launch socio-economic recovery.



PEOPLE IN DETENTION INCLUDING CHILDREN

- Accelerate efforts to increase the number of family visits and visits of other essential contacts of persons held in prison, with particular focus on urgently increasing such visits to children in prison, in line with the improving epidemiological situation. It is important to ensure more frequent direct physical contact to increase the level of psychosocial support to people, especially children, in prison, as alternative modes of communication cannot fully substitute direct contact.
- While restrictions remain on visits, ensure frequent and free-of-charge alternative means for communication between detainees and their families.
- Continue improving the material conditions of detention and police custody facilities, building new ones where needed, to ensure adequate health and hygiene conditions, including in Bijelo Polje and Pljevlja.
- Increase staffing capacities at the Ljubovic Centre to provide the best possible support to resident children and to assist them with distance learning if it were to be reintroduced.



LGBTI COMMUNITY

- Support LGBTI persons, primarily those who have lost their income and have been forced to return to hostile primary home environments because they are not able to afford independent living.
- Ensure psychosocial support to LGBTI persons through supporting relevant NGOs.
- Authorities ensure that only strictly necessary data is requested for people to be able to receive COVID-related support and that the privacy and confidentiality of any data is fully respected.



DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT RECIPIENTS OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

- Many individuals and families who have lost their income due to COVID-19 or who were already poverty-stricken before are not benefitting from any social protection schemes. This group should be borne in mind while designing recovery programmes.
- Apart from assistance in terms of food, hygiene, diapers and clothes, cash assistance or subsidies are also needed, particularly for people with unpaid rent and electricity bills, and for families whose members have specific health-related needs, and assistance for children to be able to engage in distance learning (internet, smartphone, tablet).
- Besides this urgent support, ensure help with finding a job and securing a steady income.
- Provide support to children in reference to extracurricular and recreational activities, and for distance learning, where needed.
- Find a way/designate an institution or organization to support this vulnerable group given their inability to meet the means-test criteria to be able to access CSW support, which makes it unclear who they can turn to for assistance.



TENANTS

- Find a way to register tenants in order to be able to plan targeted support measures.
- Relevant assistance should include rent subsidies, free access to the healthcare system and medicines, and subsidized utility bills.
- Develop tailor-made employment support measures.
- Cooperation between the national- and local-level authorities is needed when designing the relevant support measures.