Westminster Building Safety Consultation:

Report of OVERALL Consultation Findings



Independently Compiled by Commonplace for the City of Westminster

City of Westminster

March 2024

Commonplace

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The Building Safety Engagement Strategy

Prioritising the welfare of residents is a primary goal of Westminster City Council.

One of the key aims of the Building Safety Act is to ensure residents are at the heart of all key decisions around building safety. With this in mind, the City Council have established a dedicated Building Safety Team to oversee safety standards in the buildings they manage.

This team are currently creating an engagement strategy to involve and communicate with residents and building users about safety measures for both new and existing buildings.

This engagement strategy will enhance engagement by informing, involving, and communicating with residents and building users about building safety measures for both new and existing buildings.

Focusing on high-rise buildings, consultation will assist in the creation of a specific resident engagement strategy for each building that has 7 or more storeys, or that are 18 metres or higher.

The Objectives of the Engagement Strategy

The resident engagement strategy will aim to:

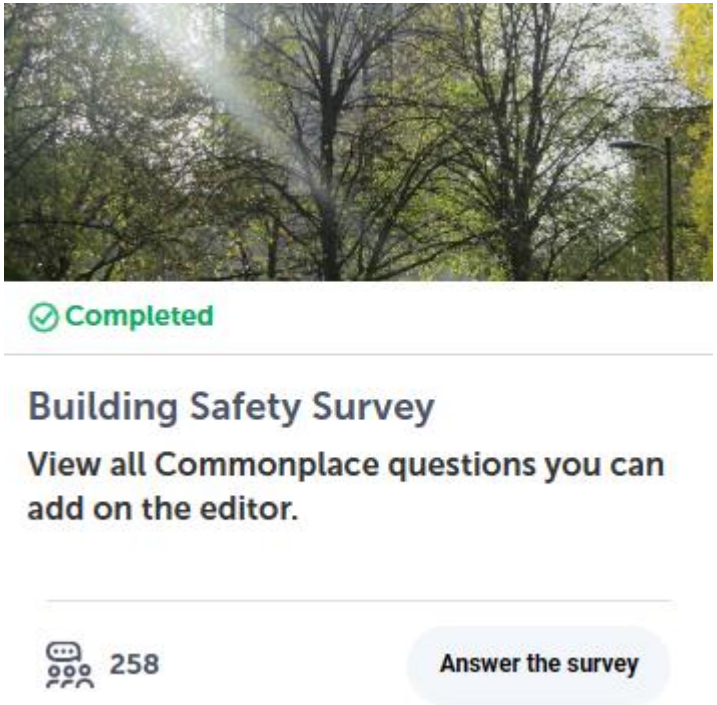
- Empower residents to actively contribute to the safety of their building.
- Outline ways in which residents can participate and the benefits of being involved.
- Identify the types of safety information residents need, and preferences for how this information can be shared.
- Improve the way in which the City Council interacts with residents about the safety of their home.
- Ensure City Council staff understand residents' right to have a say in decisions about their home.
- Clarify the responsibilities of both the council and residents in maintaining a safe living environment.

Consultation Methodology

To assist with the development of the engagement strategy and to identify areas where improvements are needed, the City Council invited 7,662 residents in 134 of Westminster Housing's high-rise buildings (of 7+ storeys or 18m+ in height) to voice their concerns and opinions.

An online consultation ran from Monday 13th November 2023 to Friday 26th January 2024. This consultation was hosted on the Commonplace engagement platform.

Participants could respond to the questions asked, and/or leave comments as necessary.



Presenting the Information Collected

Information has been collated and analysed for ALL of the tower blocks in which consultation took place.

In presenting the feedback collected, consultation contributions have been collated, analysed, detailed and summarised independently of Westminster City Council's Building Safety Team. This ensures a clear impartiality of consideration and presentation.

Commonplace data forms the statistical focus of this feedback.

Please note: all percentages have been rounded and may therefore not total exactly 100%.

Headline Findings

Produced for Westminster City Council, this report presents the findings of a consultation on building safety with residents of Westminster Housing's high-rise tower blocks. 321 residents participated in the consultation via the online Commonplace platform from 13.11.2023 - 26.1.2024. This represents 4% of all residential units.

321 residents

- The consultation results shows that while many residents (64%) **do feel safe** in their building, many do not feel ***very*** safe. Younger residents, those with long-term, limiting health problems, illnesses and disabilities, and minority ethnic residents were least likely to feel safe in their building. There is also a correlation between knowing what to do in the event of a fire and feeling safe. When residents **do know what to do**, they feel safer.

- Reasons underpinning a lack of optimum safety included issues around **non-residents accessing buildings**, perceptions of a lack of **safe evacuation routes**, inadequate maintenance of **individual and communal doors**, perceptions of generally **inadequate maintenance of/safety checks** within buildings, and **access/communal area clutter** impeding exits.

- More than a third of residents (35%) are **unaware/unsure of actions to take in the event of a fire.** This lack of awareness peaks among minority ethnic residents and those residents who do not speak English.

- **Written communication is by far the most preferred medium of building safety communications** – with a clear focus on **letters and emails**. A need for communication only in the event of **a change in building safety information** is evident.

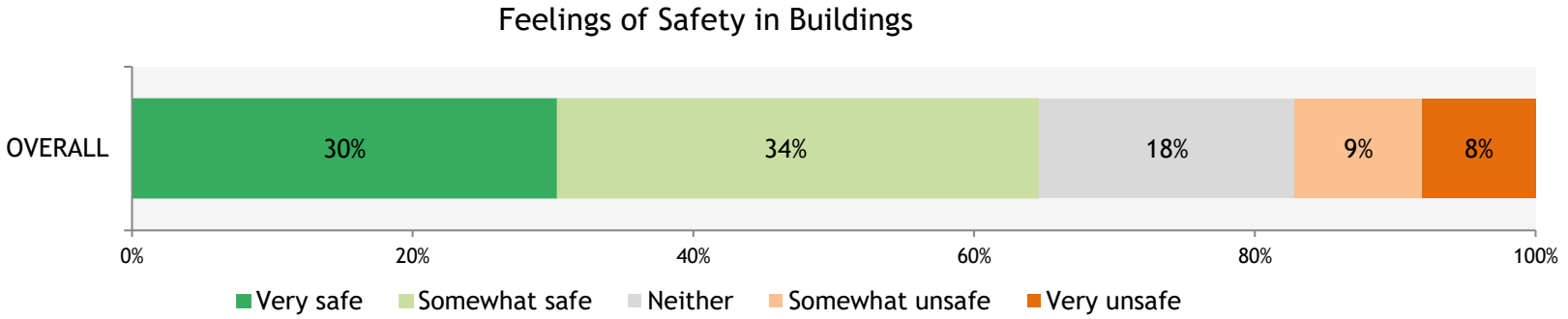
Feelings of Building Safety Among Residents





Feelings of Safety

While 64% of consultation participants indicated that they felt safe in their building, just 30% said that they felt ***very safe***.



On the following page we see how feelings of safety varied among residents of different demographics.

How Feelings of Safety Vary Among Residents

Three groups of residents are *less likely to feel safe* in their building than others.

Age: Those under the age of 35 are most likely to feel very unsafe – with 1 in every 5 of these residents feeling this way. Older residents (65+) tend to feel safer than younger residents.

Long-term, limiting illness, health problems and/or disabilities: Residents with a long-term, limiting illness which limited their daily activities are far less likely to feel safe in their building (43%) compared to those with no limiting health issues (68%).

Ethnicity: Minority ethnic residents are less likely to feel safe in their building (58%), compared to White British residents (66%).

Awareness of what to do in the event of a fire in the building: Those residents who are *unaware* of what to do in the event of a fire in their building are less likely to feel safe in their building (52%) than residents who are aware of fire procedures (69%).

Why Some Residents Feel Unsafe

64 consultation participants provided information as to why they do not feel safe in their building. More than one reason was sometimes specified.

- Non-residents accessing the building (16 comments).
- Drug dealers/users accessing the building (9 comments).
- Lack of safe evacuation routes (9 comments).
- Inadequate maintenance of individual and communal doors (9 comments).
- Generally inadequate maintenance of buildings (6 comments).
- Lack of building safety checks/audits (6 comments).
- Access/communal area clutter impeding exits (5 comments).

Other issues (each with 4 comments or less) included: a lack of personal and communal fire prevention measures, lift maintenance/safety issues, faulty/absence of smoke detectors, unsafe building construction materials, Victoria Railway Station potentially weakening the building structure – wall cracks, window maintenance/safety issues, absence of sprinklers and extractor fans, stairway issues, eroded cables, cigarette fire risks, anti-social behaviour, damp/mould, low balconies and a perceived lack of action in response to resident complaints.

Additional Building Safety Suggestions

In addition to the previously identified building safety concerns, some participants also provided a number of other suggestions for improvement. These are shown below – each given by single or very small numbers of residents. More than one suggestion was sometimes made.

- Provide extractor fans in kitchens to minimise alarms being set off unnecessarily.
- Prevent residents from blocking communal entrances/exits (when charging mobility scooters, etc.).
- Replace and provide safety equipment as intended (i.e. new doors, sprinklers).
- Raise fire procedure awareness among residents.
- Pre-identify vulnerable residents in the event of a fire.
- Concierge to regularly patrol and check for safety issues (i.e. maintenance needs).
- Ensure estate staff proactively communicate with residents using all languages necessary.
- Work with residents to develop safety plans and take action on resident consultation findings.
- Have local estate offices.
- Use approved/competent building works contractors.
- Ensure CCTV is in good working order and plentiful.
- Prevent dangerous falling masonry and window parts.
- Ensure safety around the gas station which sits under Dorset House.

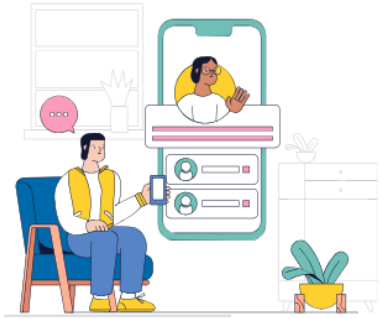
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Additional Building Safety Suggestions

Continued…

- Ensure a risk assessment framework/fire safety information is being used and is easily accessible by residents – tailored to specific buildings.
- Have well communicated evacuation drills in place.
- Maintain communal doors and ensure individual doors are fire safety compliant.
- Maintain surrounding lighting.
- Attend Residents' Association meetings.
- Reinforce tenancy agreements and evictions to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- Tackle building leaks.
- Ensure all works comply with Building Fire Safety regulations.
- Stop fires in communal bins.
- Ensure chute rooms are fire safe.
- Ensure fire alarm tests are in full working order.
- Provide numbers on all stairwells.
- Remove combustible material from balconies.
- Attend to damp/mould issues.

Fire Procedure Awareness





Fire Procedure Awareness

Around two-thirds (65%) of residents felt that they knew what to do in the event of a fire in their building.

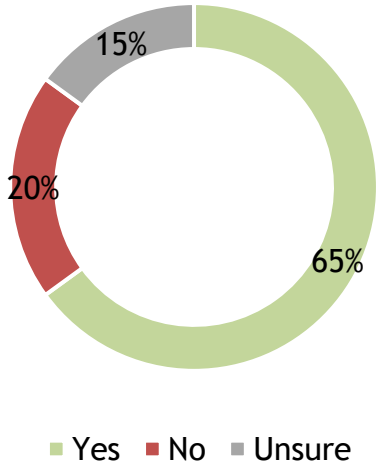
Two groups of residents are *less likely to know what to do in the event of a fire in their building:*

Minority ethnic residents are less likely to know what to do in the event of a fire (62%), compared to White British residents (87%).

Residents who do not speak English are far less likely to know what to do in the event of a fire (43%) compared to those who do speak English (70%).

Fire procedure awareness

OVERALL



Preferred Communication

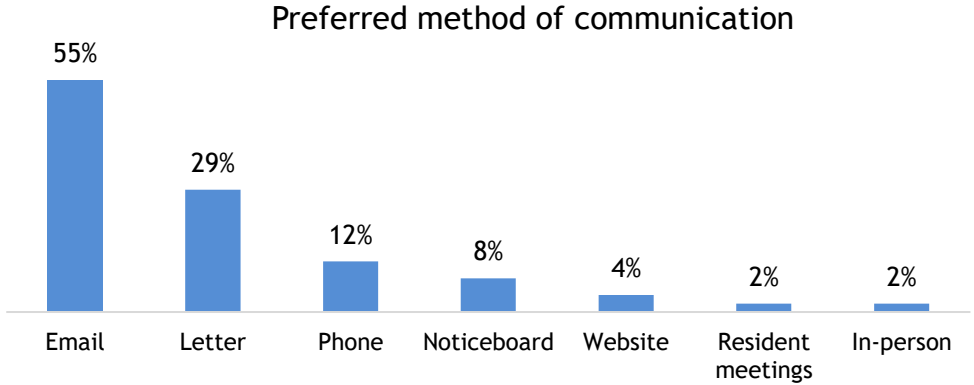




Preferred Building Safety Communications

Method

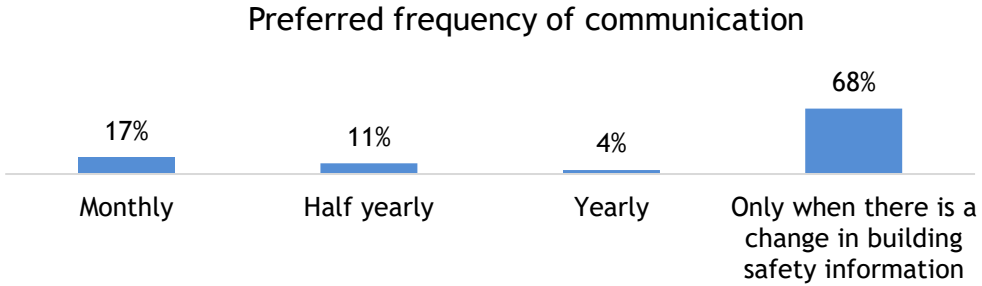
Email (55%), followed by letter (29%) were by far the most preferred methods of communication.



More than one method of communication was sometimes specified.

Frequency

A majority of residents (68%) requested building safety communication only when a change was evident.



Building Safety Focus Group Interest





Interest in Building Safety Focus Group Participation

28 residents expressed an interest in participating in a building safety focus group.



Acknowledgements and Next Steps





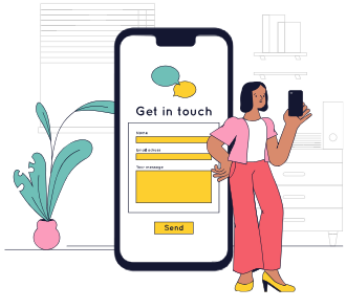
Thank You to all Residents who Participated in the Consultation

Following this consultation, Westminster City Council will establish a building safety working group to address the specific issues raised. Additionally, they will develop a bespoke resident engagement strategy for all high-risk buildings, providing comprehensive information to residents about specific blocks.

Below are some examples of the information that it is proposed to share with residents:

- How to report a safety issue.
- Summary of the Fire Risk Assessment.
- Summary of the measures in place to mitigate the potential spread of fire.
- Summary of the measures in place to mitigate any building structural safety risks.
- How residents can help us to manage building safety risks.
- How to make a complaint to Westminster City Council.
- How Westminster City Council will consult and engage with residents about building safety.

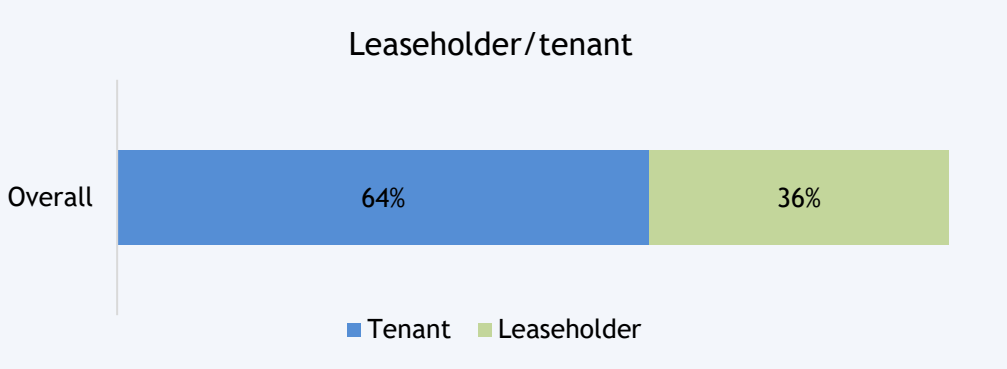
Appendix: Consultation Participants





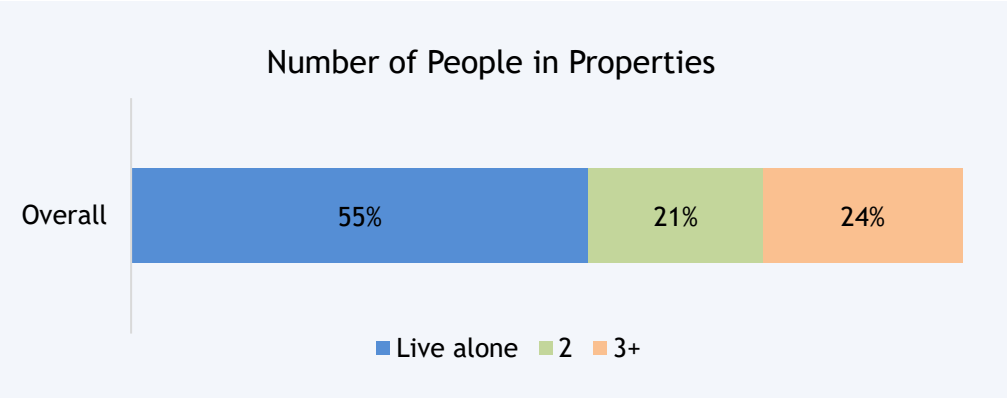
Leaseholders and Tenants

More tenants (64%) than leaseholders (36%) participated in the consultation.



Number of People in Properties

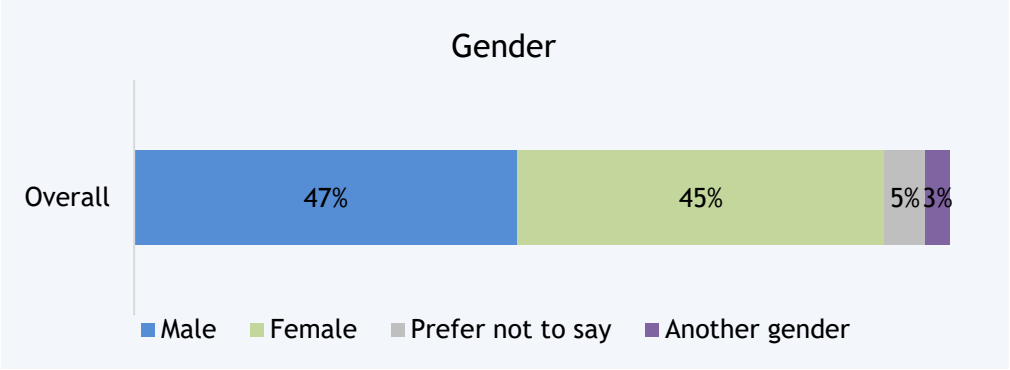
A majority of residents (55%) were living alone. However, note a significant proportion living in 2 or 3+ person households.



Gender

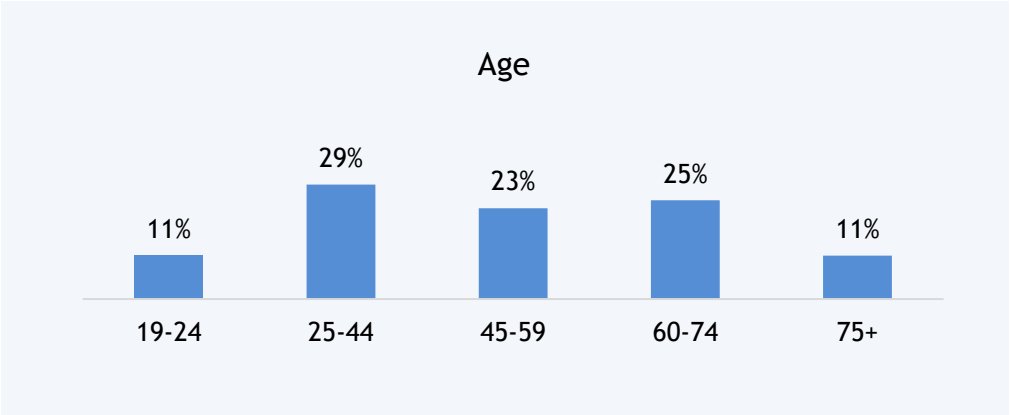
Fairly even proportions of males and females participated in the consultation. Those identifying as another gender included non-binary, transgender and intersex.

1% of participants identified with another gender not assigned at birth.



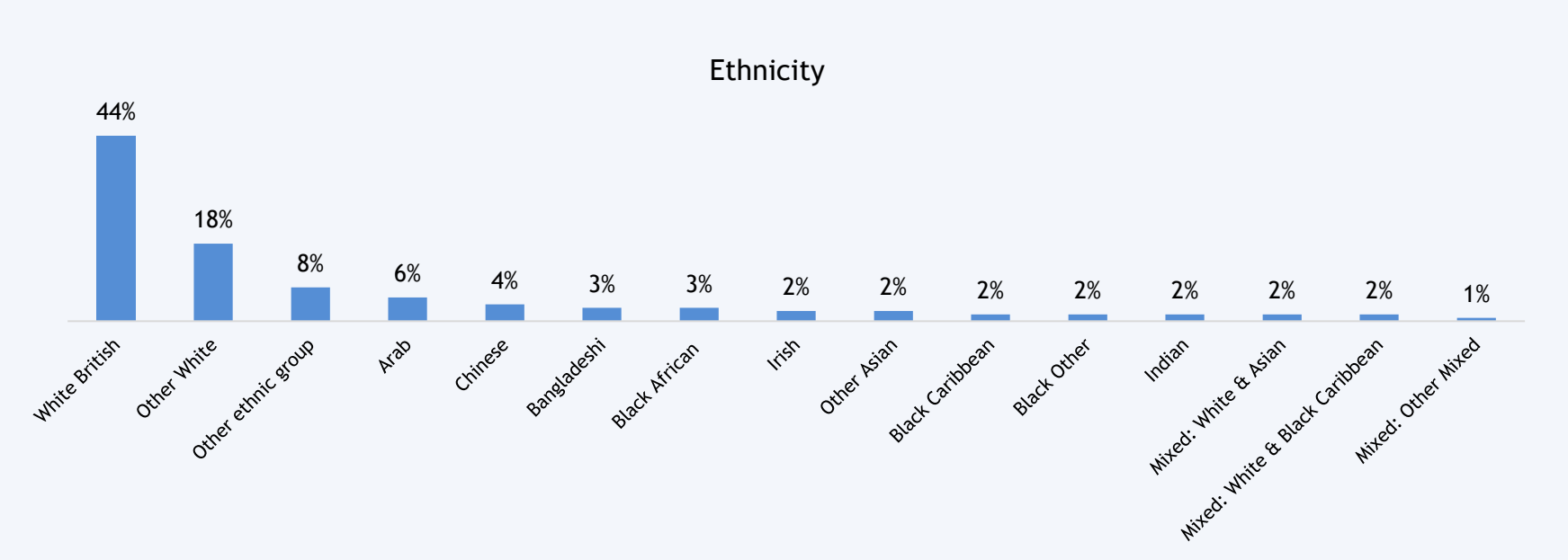
Age

Residents of all ages participated in the consultation.



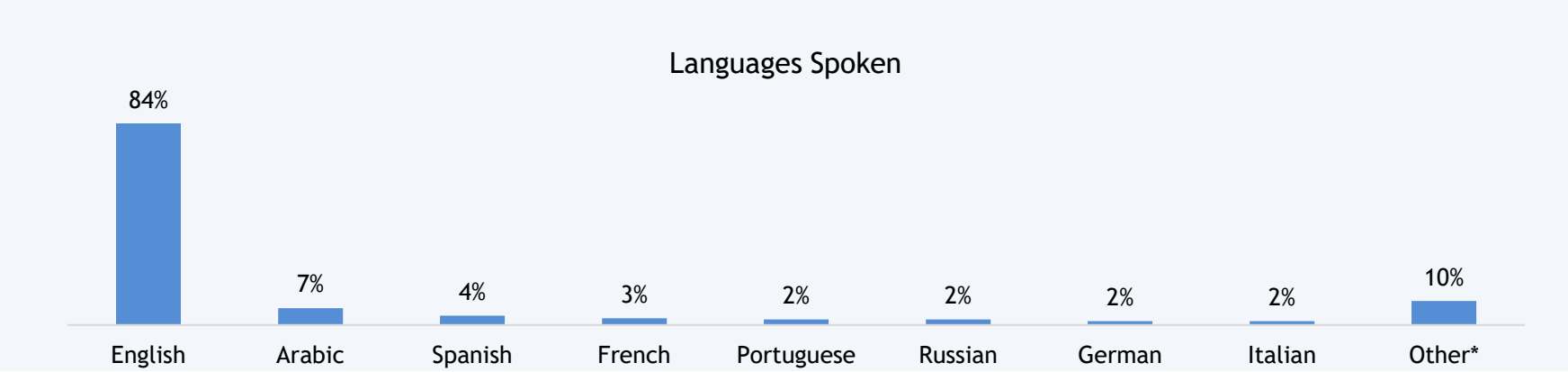
Ethnicity

While 44% of consultation participants were White British, a higher collective percentage (56%) were of other ethnicities – most frequently including Other White, Other ethnic groups and Arab.



Languages Spoken

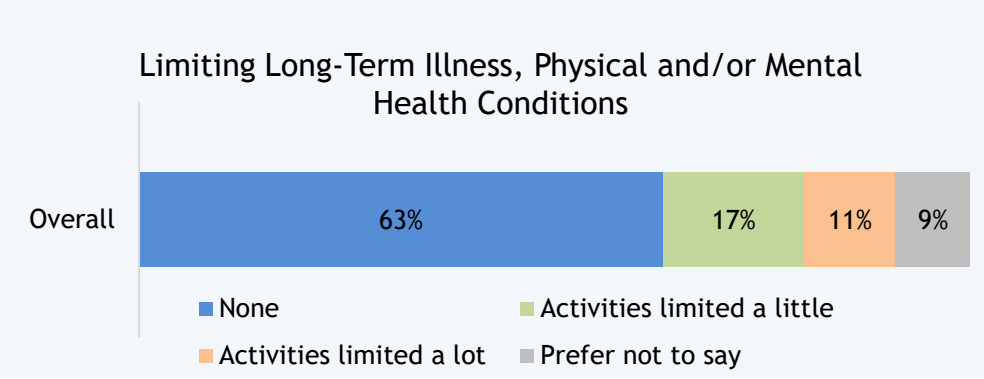
84% of consultation participants indicated that English was spoken in their home. More than one language was sometimes specified.



*Other languages spoken – each specified by no more than 1% of participants - included Bengali, Albanian, Filipino, Urdu, Bangla, Korean, Kurdish, Moroccan, Greek, Mandarin, Serbian, Chinese, Sotho, Czech and Amharic.

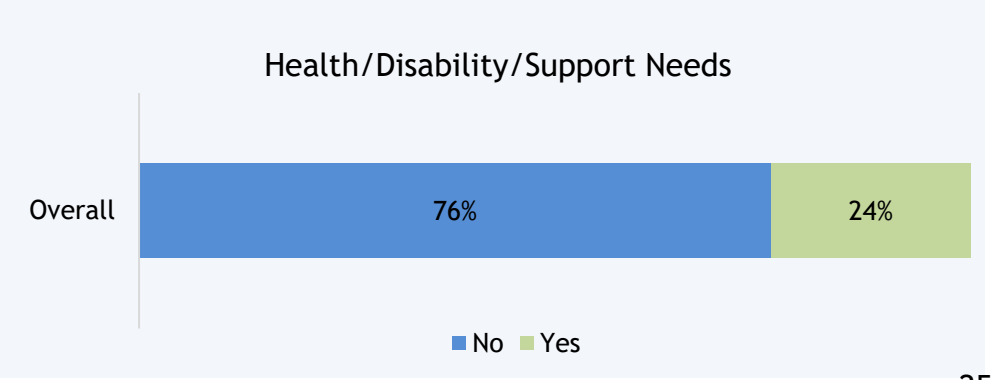
Limiting Long-Term Illness, Physical and/or Mental Health Conditions

28% of consultation participants indicated that they had a long-term illness, physical and/or mental health condition which impacted their day-to-day activities.



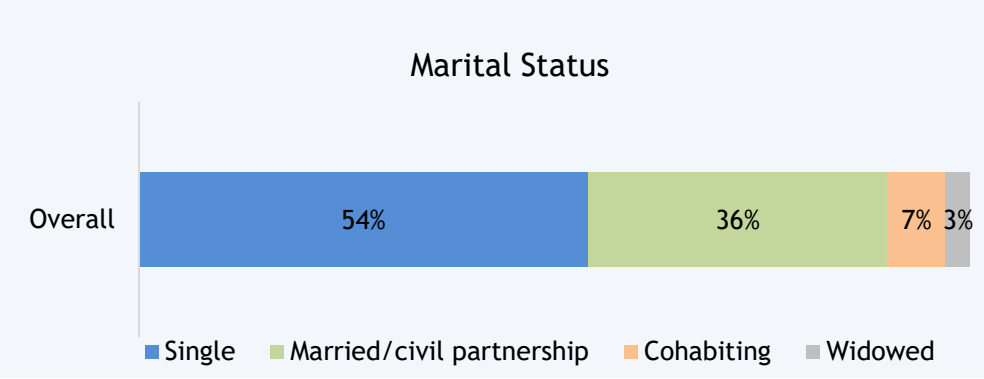
Health, Disability and Support Needs

Almost a quarter (24%) of consultation participants indicated that they had a health, disability or support need which should be taken into account in any interaction with them.



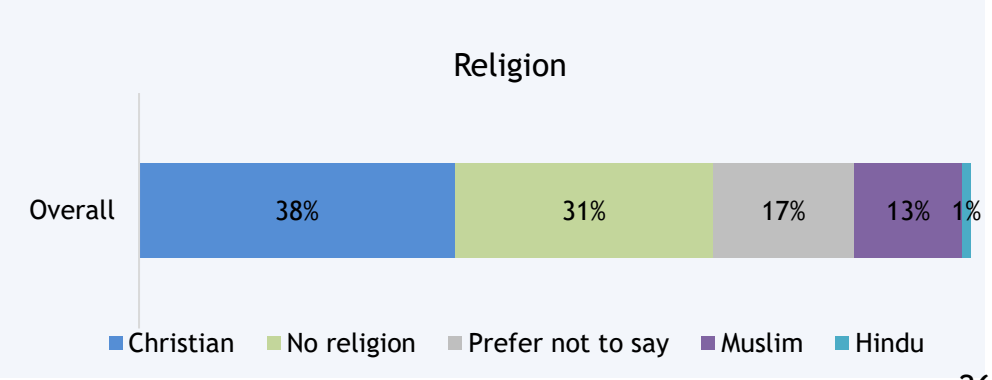
Marital Status

Consultation participants were most likely to be single (54%).



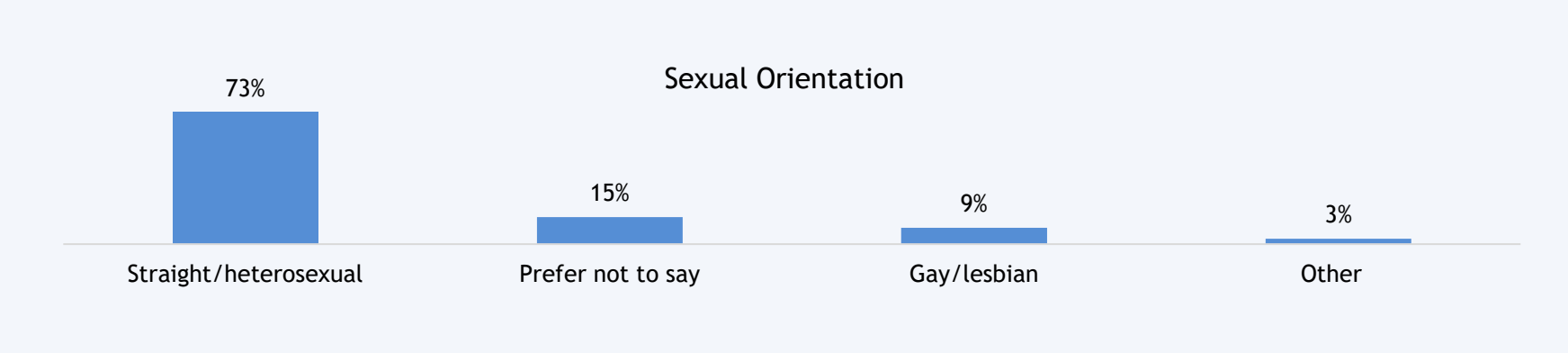
Religion

Consultation participants were most likely to be Christian (38%) or have no religion (31%).



Sexual Orientation

Approaching three-quarters (73%) of consultation participants described their sexual orientation as straight/heterosexual.



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