

# **The impact of the rising cost of living on equine rescues, rehoming centres, and sanctuaries**

Survey findings | June 2023

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# Background

01.

**The National Equine Welfare Council (NEWC) has been a united voice on equine welfare matters for over three decades, with member organisations from across the equine sector.**

**In December 2022 and January 2023, a small group of members led by World Horse Welfare conducted a survey on behalf of NEWC.**

The objective was to gather evidence about the impact of the rising cost of living on equine rescue centres, sanctuaries, and rehoming organisations, share that information with the United Kingdom and devolved governments, and identify what educational material may be helpful.



# Summary

# 02.

All rescues, rehoming centres, and sanctuaries that responded to the survey report being concerned with the rising cost of living. Many are seeing an increase in calls from owners asking to hand over their equines, as well as in potential welfare cases.

Additionally, they are themselves facing rising operational costs, including those not directly related to horse keeping such as electricity, gas, water, and fuel. However, most organisations are not in a position where they need to cut back on the care of their equines, and a majority will keep taking in equines and travelling to visit welfare concerns.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>As highlighted this report summarises the findings of a survey conducted over winter 2022-2023, NEWC recognises that the situation may be different at the time of publication of this report (June 2023).

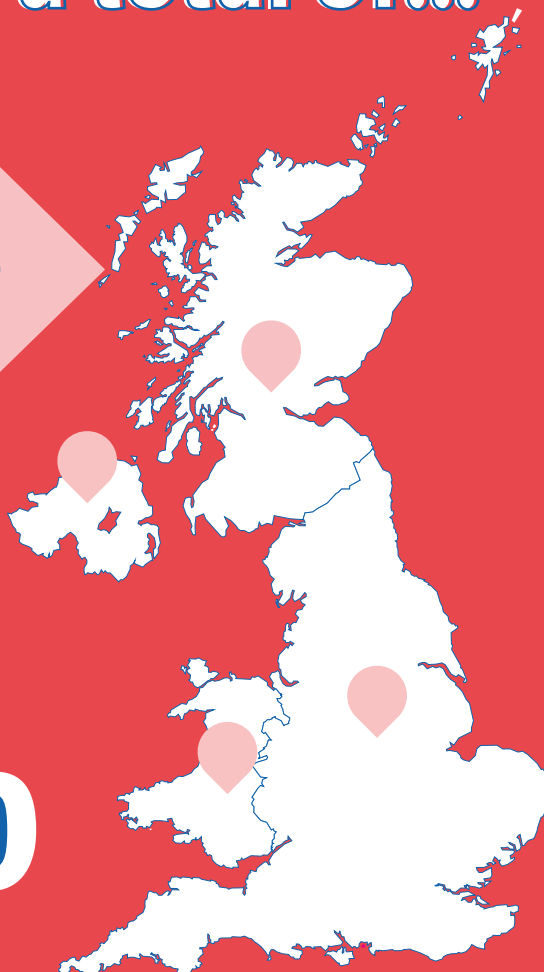
# Participants

03.

# The survey received a total of...

**36**  
responses

from organisations operating  
across all four countries of the  
United Kingdom.



Under  
**£20,000** -  
to over  
**£1,000,000**

The annual turnover of the participating organisations  
ranged from under £20,000 to over £1,000,000.

The maximum ideal stocking  
density ranged from...

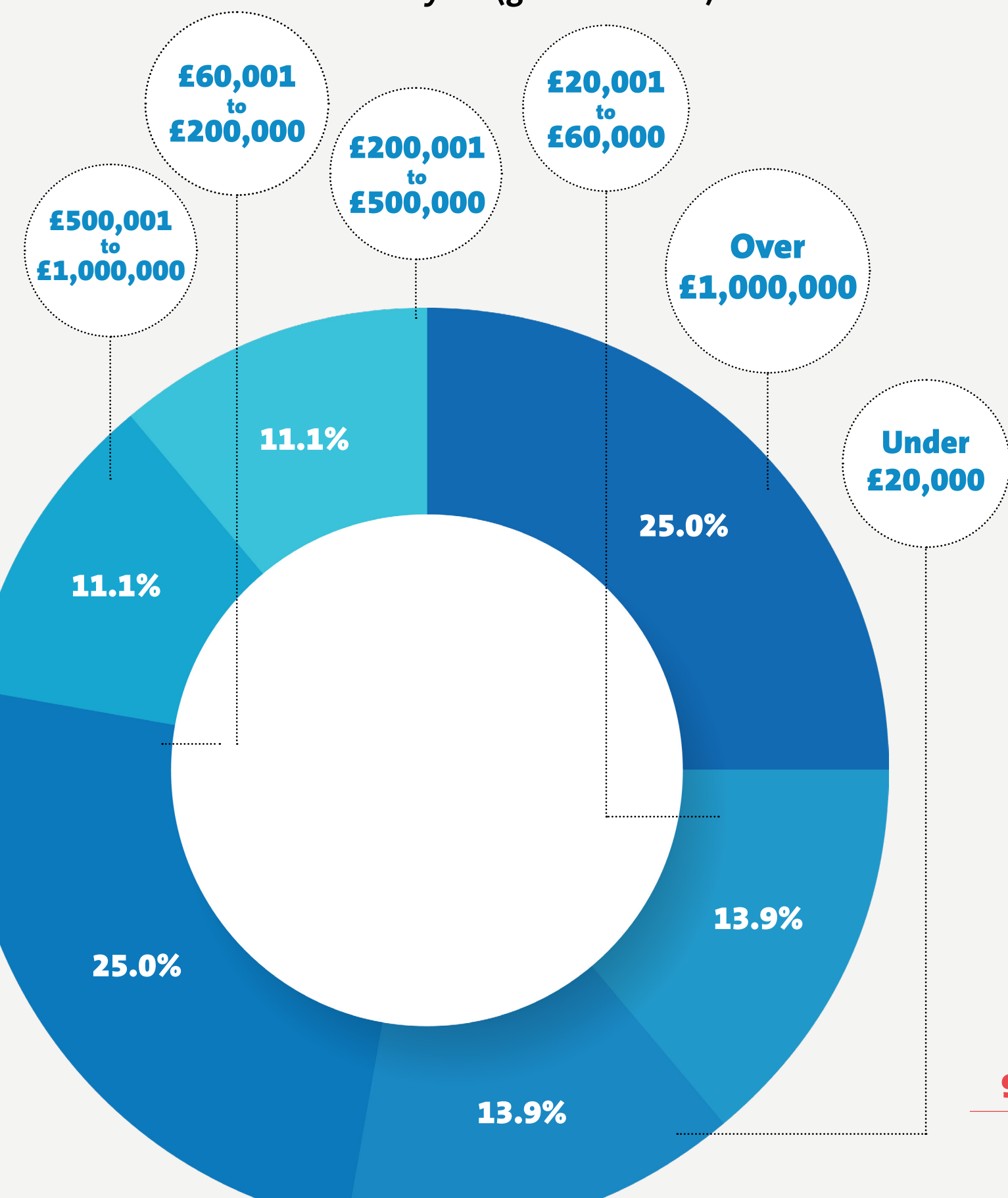
**10 to 2534**  
equines...



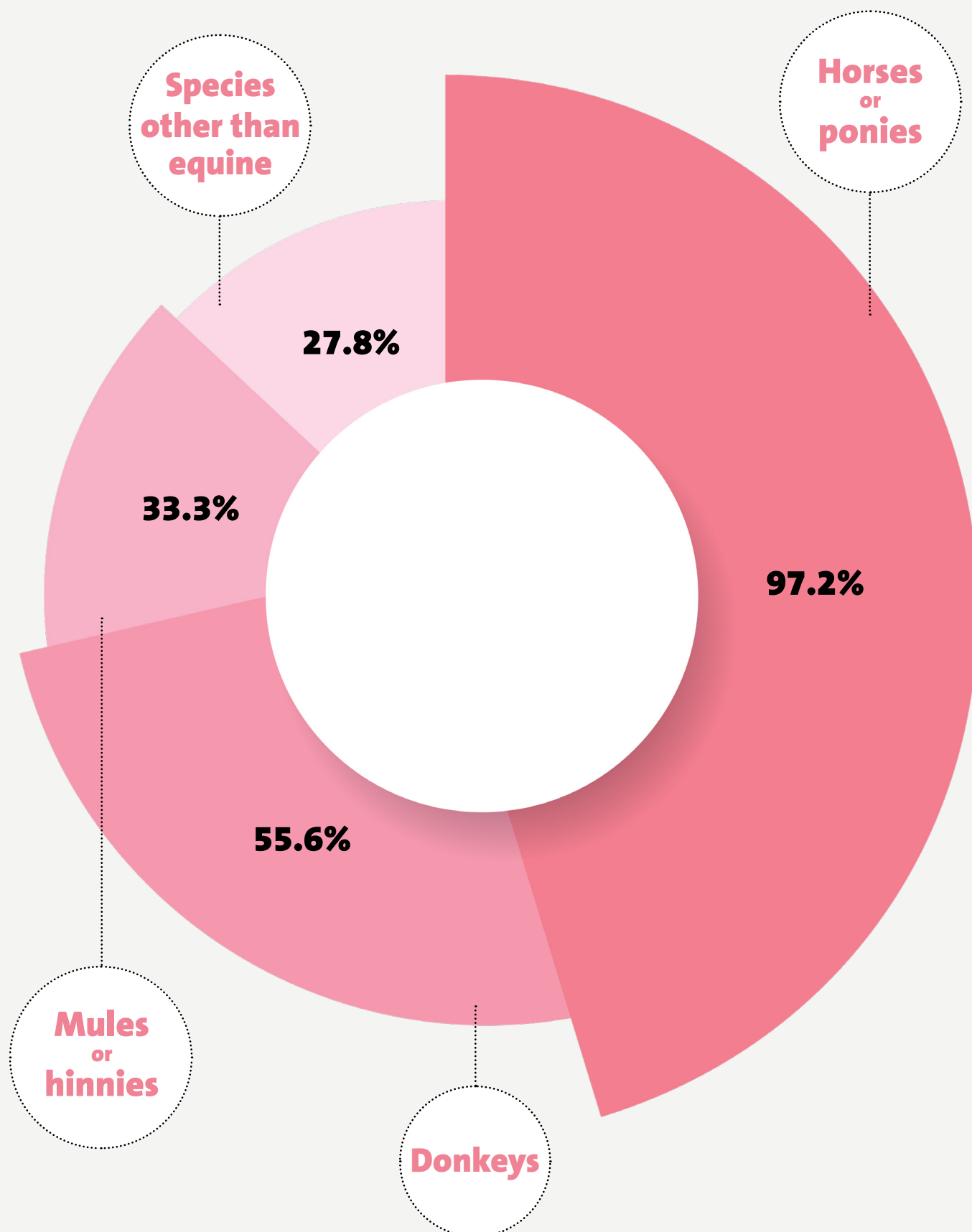
...with nearly 3 quarters of  
respondents reporting a stocking  
density of 50 equines or lower.



**What is the annual turnover of your organisation?**  
By annual turnover, we mean the total business income for the year (gross revenue).



## What type of equines are in your organisation's care? (Select all that apply).



# Key Findings

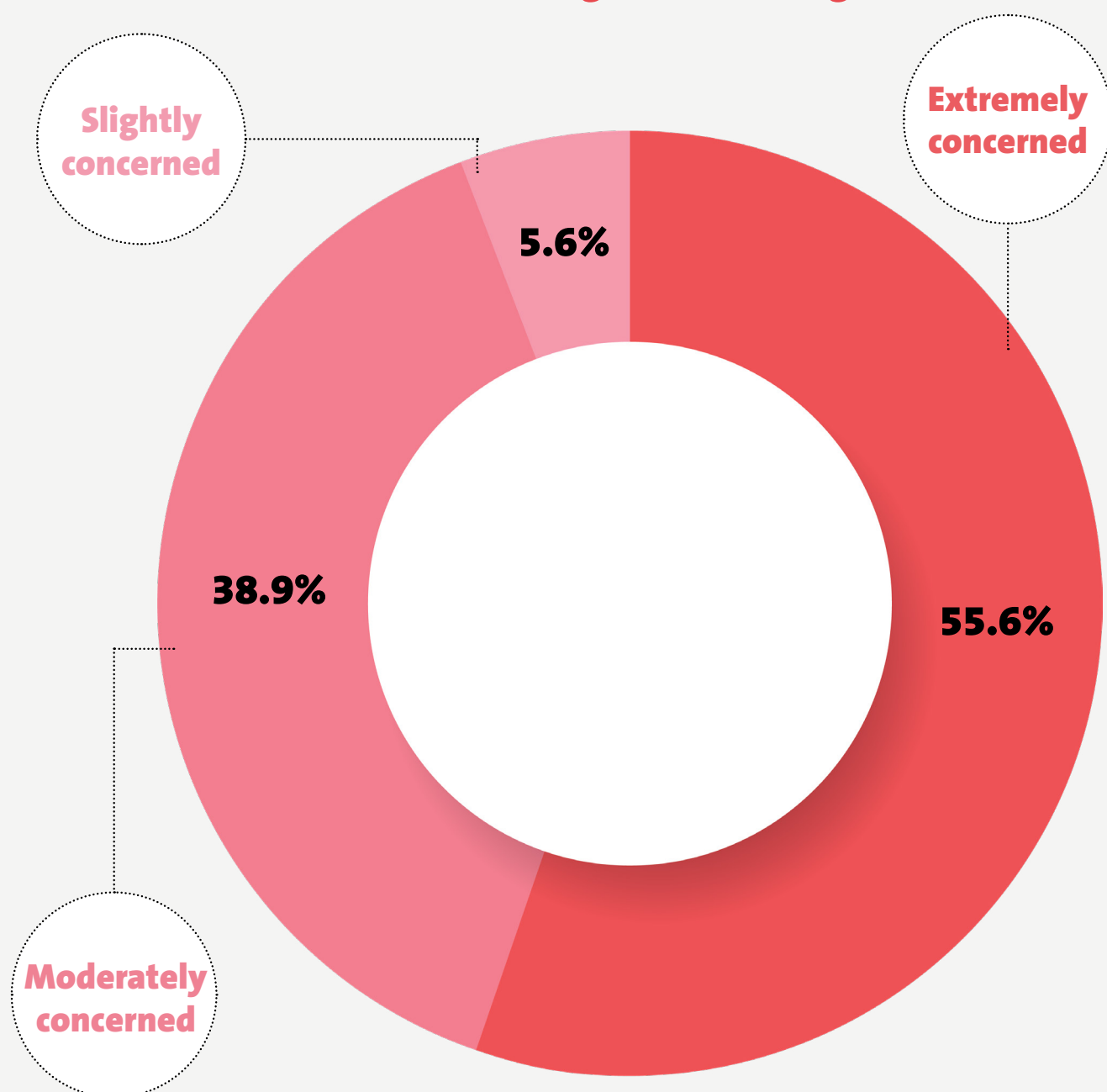
# 04.

## All are concerned with the rising cost of living.

All organisations are concerned with the rising cost of living and how it will impact the care and welfare of equines, with over half saying they are extremely concerned.

This relates both to their own ability to maintain operations and to the impact rising costs may have on equine welfare in a broader sense.

### How concerned is your organisation with the rising cost of living?



80%

Almost 80% of respondents have noted an increase in calls from the public wanting to hand over their equines.

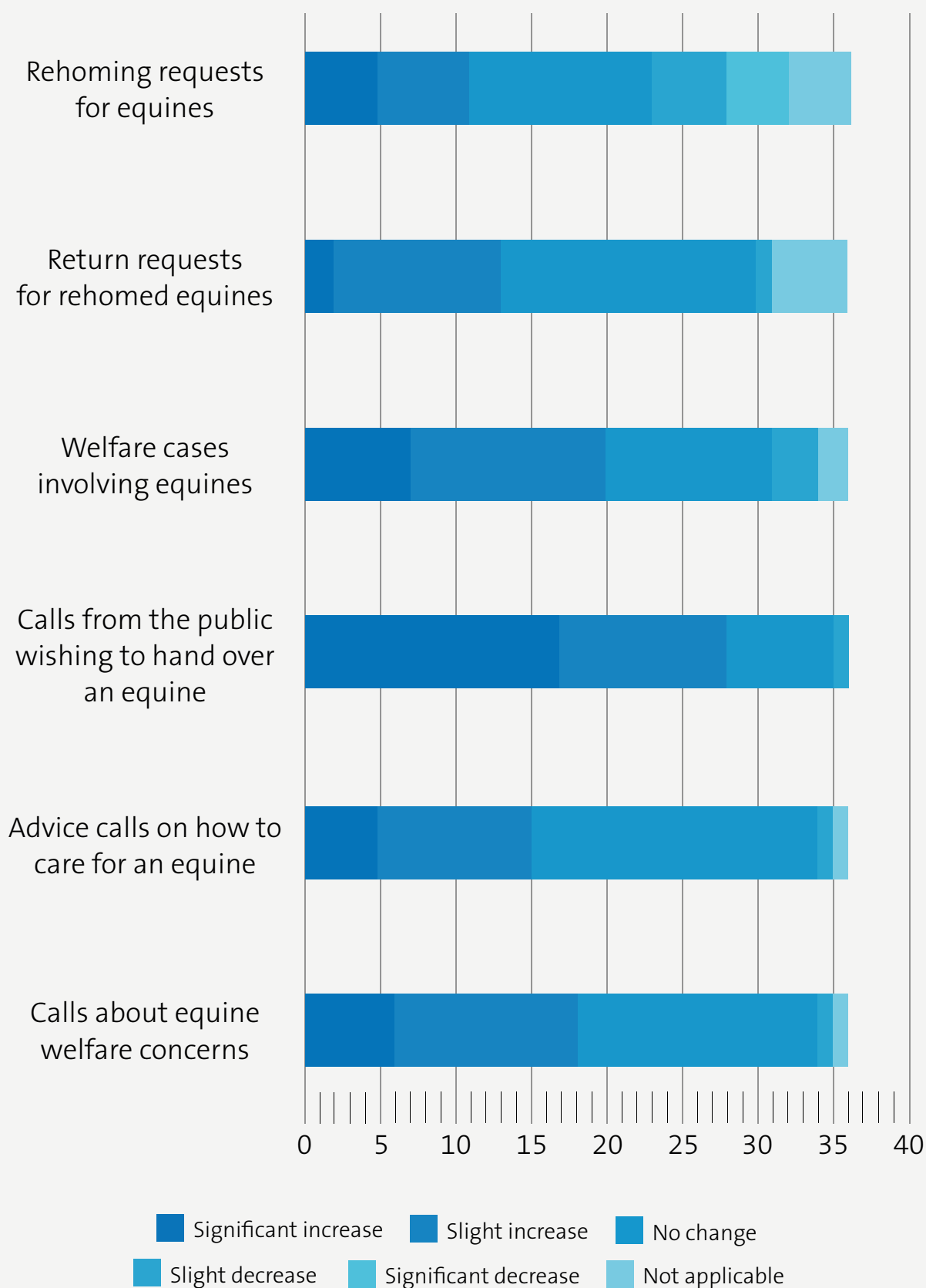
60%

Almost 60% have noticed an increase in welfare cases involving equines.



***“We are seeing an increase in retired and elderly horses coming to us.”***

## Compared to this time last year, has your organisation experienced change in any of the following areas?



## Rising costs across all areas

Almost all organisations report increases in costs related to general maintenance of their premises such as electricity, gas, and water, with two thirds saying the increases are significant. In addition, almost all report that fuel has become more expensive. Equine-related costs such as feed, forage, and bedding have also increased for almost all organisations, with half calling the increases significant.



Four out of five equine welfare organisations say routine veterinary care has become more expensive.



Three out of four say unplanned veterinary care has become more expensive.

*“We have had some of our donors cancel their direct debits and predict that more will do the same.”*



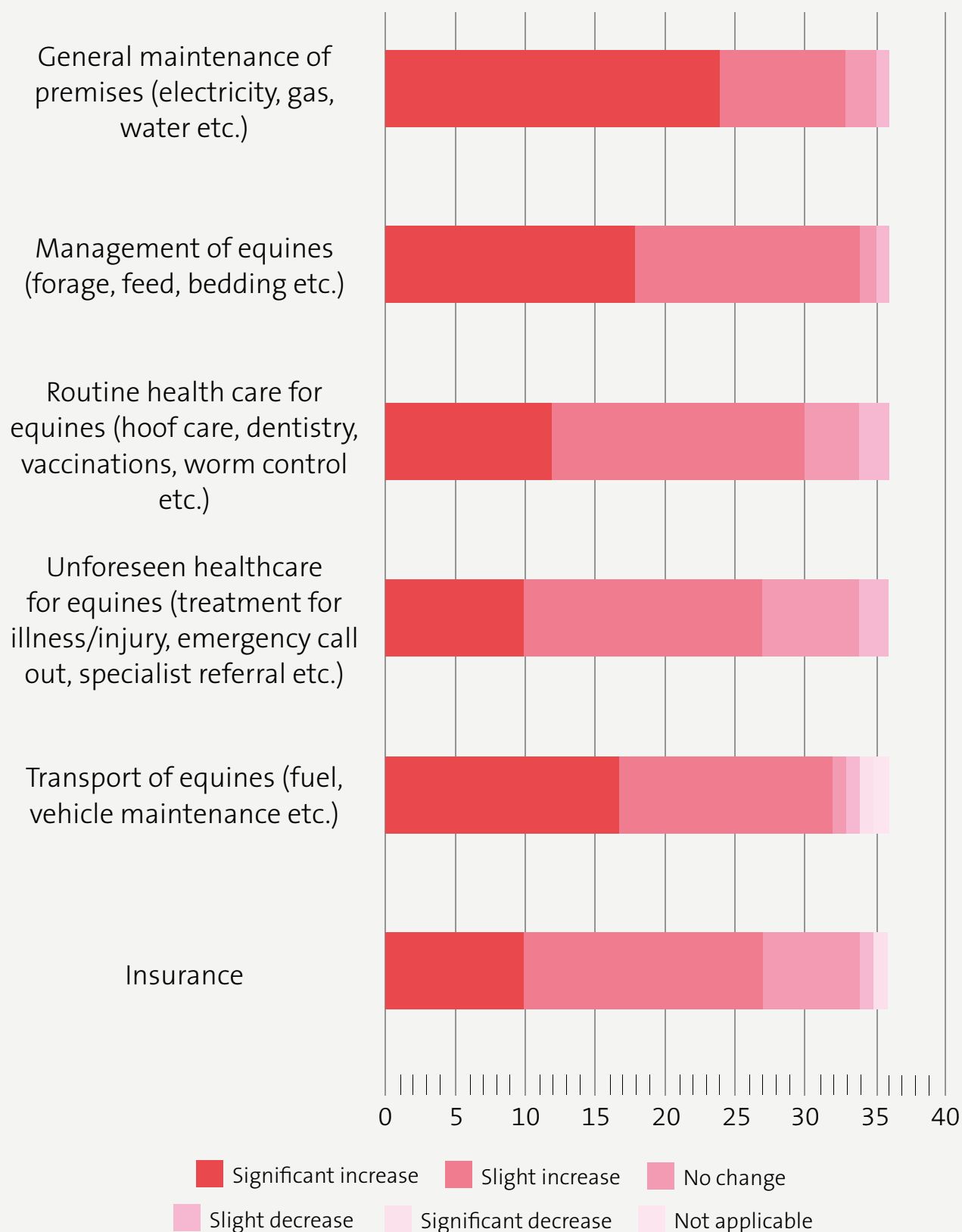
Several organisations highlight the fact that the rising cost of living also affects their ability to generate income in the form of donations, as donors facing rising costs and lower disposable income are forced to cut back on expenses such as charity donations.

In addition, some report that they are struggling to find volunteers as people increasingly cannot afford the cost of transport or prioritise finding paid work instead. The same challenges relate to staffing, as some rescues report struggling with the cost of hiring new personnel.





## Compared to this time last year, has your organisation experienced a change in costs in any of the following areas?



## Lingering effects of Covid-19

Many organisations are still dealing with fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic which compounds the effect of the rising costs, as they are not in as strong a financial situation as they would have been pre-pandemic.



**20%**

Almost 20% say they have not recovered at all from any negative effects.



**60%**

Almost 60% say they have recovered only partially.



**>20%**

Fewer than 20% say they have recovered fully.

## Managing costs effectively

In general, organisations are not cutting back on the care of their equines but are choosing to save money in other areas, like switching to cheaper forage or decreasing the amount of forage they feed. They are more open to making changes in maintenance of premises and management, such as cutting back on purchase of equipment and non-welfare related travel.

This is a positive indication that the welfare of the equines currently in the cares of these rescues, rehoming centres, and sanctuaries is not being compromised.

Most organisations already implement cost-saving and welfare-increasing measures such as maximising turnout time.





*“We look at competitively priced but quality products rather than making decisions on price alone.”*





Responses show that there is still capacity within the equine welfare sector, with most organisations saying they will keep taking in equines and travelling to visit welfare concerns. However, almost half say they will minimise the number of equines they take in and implement stricter selection criteria for these equines. This corresponds with almost half reporting being close to, at, or over capacity with little room left for new equines.

*“Intake remains on case-by-case basis, according to need, capacity and our resource.”*





## Supporting equine owners

Some organisations are providing, or are considering providing, additional support to help owners cope with the cost-of-living crisis, such as advice or emergency cover for veterinary costs.

“[We] have created emergency funds for rehomers to cover one-off vet treatments that otherwise would lead to return of the horse.”





# Next Steps

05.

The results of the survey have been shared with Defra and formed the base of the NEWC response to the UK Parliament's Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee's inquiry on pet welfare and abuse in April 2023, which asked about the impact of adverse changes in the cost of living on animal welfare.

The response will inform the Committee's understanding of the situation facing equine rescues, rehoming centres, and sanctuaries, and may be used by the Committee as evidence for future recommendations and/or actions.

As costs continue to remain high, and in some areas have increased further, NEWC intends to publish a follow-up survey in autumn-winter 2023 to assess whether, and how, the situation has changed across the equine welfare sector. In the meantime, NEWC is assessing what educational material already exists that may be helpful to support the equine welfare sector in mitigating the impacts of rising costs and identifying resources that may need to be developed.

Parallel to this survey, NEWC also launched a [survey](#) to gauge the potential impact of the rise in costs on horse owners. NEWC is assessing ways to support the recommendations from the owner survey by encouraging owners to seek timely advice and to make responsible decisions for their equines.







**NEWC**  
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WELFARE COUNCIL  
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# Contributors



**WorldHorseWelfare**

