

2025 Scottish Voluntary Sector Workforce survey

December 2025

Overview

The following findings have been taken from the 2025 Voluntary Sector Workforce survey. The full report will be published January 2026.

SCVO and partners Goodmoves, Volunteer Scotland and Charity Leadership Scotland ran a large-scale survey of the Scottish voluntary sector workforce over Summer 2025. Over 1,300 voluntary sector staff and volunteers from across Scotland shared their thoughts on a range of topics from job satisfaction to health and wellbeing.

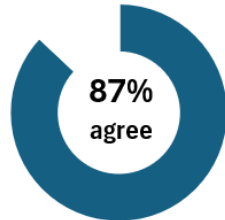
Respondents overwhelmingly highlighted that they enjoyed making a difference to people and communities, felt their work was meaningful to society, and were inspired by the work of their organisation.

Also clear, however, was the impact of the financial pressures facing the voluntary sector on the workforce, with respondents describing the stress of short-term contracts, firefighting, and threat of redundancy due to funding cycles. Concerns about the impact of this on staff recruitment and retention were also highlighted.

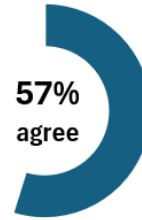
Meaningful, rewarding work

The overwhelming majority of voluntary sector workers feel that they are doing meaningful work that makes a real difference to communities and people's lives. 87% agree they are doing useful for society – far higher than the wider Scottish workforce.

I am doing useful work for society
Voluntary sector workforce survey 2025



I am doing useful work for society
CIPD Working Lives Scotland 2025



84% of respondents said that making a real difference to people and communities is one of best aspects of their work, with people describing their roles as “life-changing,” “extremely rewarding,” and “incredibly satisfying.” Survey respondents felt that their jobs allow them to be flexible and innovative, while the values and ethos of their organisations was also important to many.

Testimony:

“I am allowed to be creative and develop new projects or focus on specific areas. The staff are genuinely lovely, there is a lot of training available and we are all encouraged to take part. It feels inclusive with good values and ethos.”

“The work I do is rewarding, makes a difference and provides a way for me to take action on the things that really matter to me (equality, diversity, inclusion, reducing inequality, community). My colleagues are compassionate and passionate people, committed to doing the best they can.”

Job satisfaction

The majority of voluntary sector staff (64%) said they are fairly or very satisfied with their work.

While still generally positive, job satisfaction is down 15 percentage points from 79% in 2015, suggesting that discontent and low morale has increased in the ten years since we last surveyed the people who work in sector.

The main factors driving this downturn in satisfaction appear to be around higher workloads and stress, and most importantly funding – both funding insecurity and uncertainty, and general funding shortages impacting on pay and resources.

Testimony:

“At this time the financial climate is being used by organisations to justify cuts to services, cuts to pay, cuts to staff. It is also being used to force changes to contracts increasing job insecurity and dissatisfaction”

“It is a huge honour and privilege but even I at the top of the line struggle with satisfaction when there are so many uncertainties in the sector financially and via staff wellbeing and turnover”

Job insecurity and funding uncertainty

Short-term funding is still the norm for many in the sector, and funding shortages and uncertainty are the backdrop for much of the job insecurity and associated worries experienced by the sector’s paid workforce.

- 1 in 4 survey respondents reported being on fixed-term or temporary contracts, and this rises to 1 in 3 for front-line workers. This is far higher than the wider workforce where only 1 in 10 workers is on a non-permanent contract.
- 54% of survey respondents said that uncertainty around funding for their role is one of the worst aspects of working in sector.
- 26% of voluntary sector workers said they worry about their jobs ‘All of the time’ or ‘Often’, and this rises to 41% for those on Fixed Term contracts.

More than a quarter of voluntary sector workers (27%) felt it was quite or highly likely they would lose their job in the next 12 months, twice the rate reported in the wider workforce (13%). Reasons people gave for thinking they might lose their jobs were: funding cuts, funding uncertainty, fixed-term contracts ending, organisational instability, and general funding precariousness within the voluntary sector.

Testimony:

“Uncertainty in sustainable funding is the worst thing about my job, and about the charity as a whole. We are all on temporary contracts, which is very unsettling for all.”

“I love working in the voluntary sector but I don't know how long I can continue living in the uncertainty of funding and redundancies. Even if I were to remain through another redundancy

process, there is also stress and wellbeing difficulties over being 'the last ones standing'. It is hard to have to say goodbye all of the time."

"I am on fixed term contracts and I worry about this all the time - this is a major cause of anxiety and stress"

"Our organisation is mostly funded by council contracts and the councils look to cut costs and put pressure to do more (quality wise) but with less money or reduced packages of care. This is stressful and unsustainable."

"Concerns about job security (financial security) and what that means on a yearly basis. What that means financially for my family. That is what is stressful, the uncertainty of working on a yearly contract."

"The uncertainty around available funding for my role. this causes high levels of stress at times."

Workload Sustainability

Only 50% of respondents feel they have a good work-life balance, down from 60% ten years ago (SCVO Workforce Survey 2015). Poor work-life balance is very strongly linked with reporting feeling under pressure at work and strongly linked with increased workloads.

- 73% of respondents believe that their workload has increased over the last year, and almost half of all respondents (47%) find it difficult to 'switch off' after work.
- Half of respondents (51%) report frequently experiencing high levels of stress as part of their role, and 1 in 5 had taken time off due to work-related stress in the last year.

Many respondents spoke of workloads increasing due to problems recruiting and retaining staff, often a knock-on effect of funding cuts and funding insecurity.

Inadequate funding relative to demand was frequently cited as a key driver of unsustainable workloads.

Testimony:

"Staff retention is problem within the workplace at the moment, and it is felt across all of the teams, within the young carers team we feel the strain as many of us are having to take on

additional after school activities and workloads, which can be draining and we are doing with no offers of increased wages.

“The gap between the workload we have and the resources we have is immense. I feel overstretched and like I am personally being stretched thin to cover the gap myself.”

“I cannot see myself working for any other sector, but I am still at a very early stage in my career and I worry if I continue at this pace I will face burnout”

“It is felt organisation wide the stretch on resource though and smaller teams having more work to manage”

