



The organisation of the Welfare watch in Iceland 2009 to 2013

An evaluation

Vala Jónsdóttir
valajons@hi.is

Project Manager
Social Science Reserach Institute
University of Iceland





Evaluation study

- The evaluation study is part of the Nordic Welfare Watch study project launched on the occasion of Iceland's presidency in the Nordic Council of Ministers
- The Nordic Welfare Watch 2014-2016
 - Nordic Welfare Watch and Responses to Danger
 - Recession and Welfare – Lessons for the future
 - Nordic Welfare Indicators





Aim of the Evaluation

- To describe and evaluate the organisation of the Welfare Watch
- Strengths of the Icelandic Welfare Watch
- Weaknesses of the Icelandic Welfare Watch
- What have we learned?
- Room for improvement?





Evaluation of the Welfare Watch

METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION





Quantitative data: Overview

Survey I: Working groups

- Sample: All members that participated in working groups from 2009 to 2013 ($N=124$)
- Data collection: September 2014
- Response rate: 64%
- Mean age: 53 years

Survey II: Affiliates (collaborative government instit. and NGO's)

- Sample: Staff of the agencies which were represented in the Welfare Watch ($N=1082$)
- Data collection: October 2014
- Response rate: 71%
- Mean age: 50 years

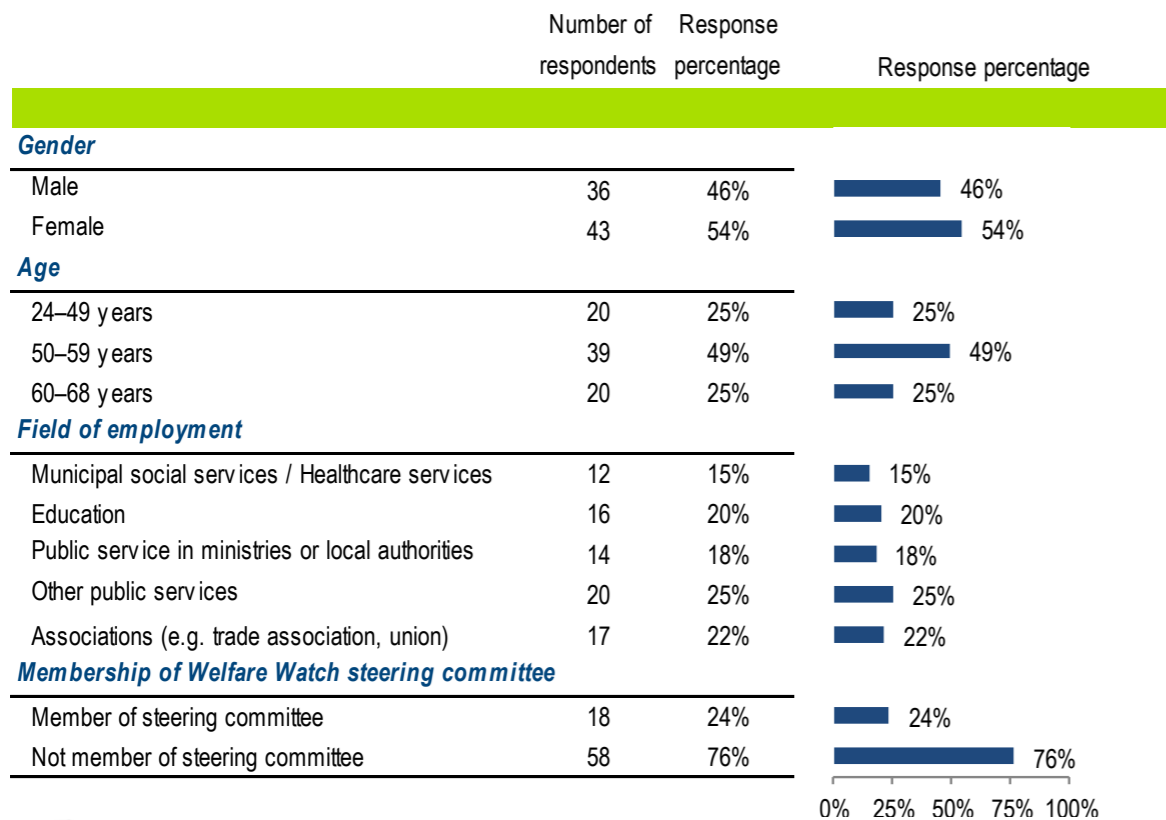
Survey III: General public (SSRI's internet panel)

- Sample: Stratified random sample from SSRI's internet panel ($N=1499$)
- Data collection: November 2014
- Response rate: 63%
- Mean age: 46 years

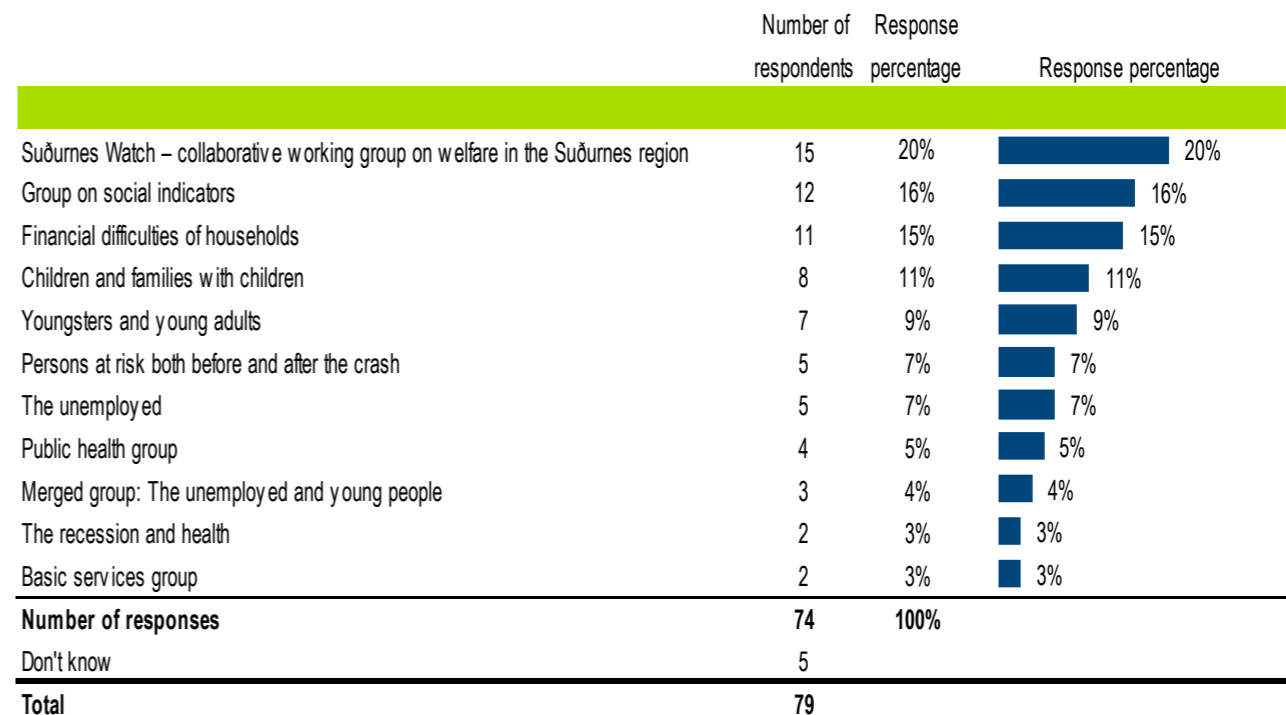


Survey I: Working groups

Group composition



Which working group did you contribute to?





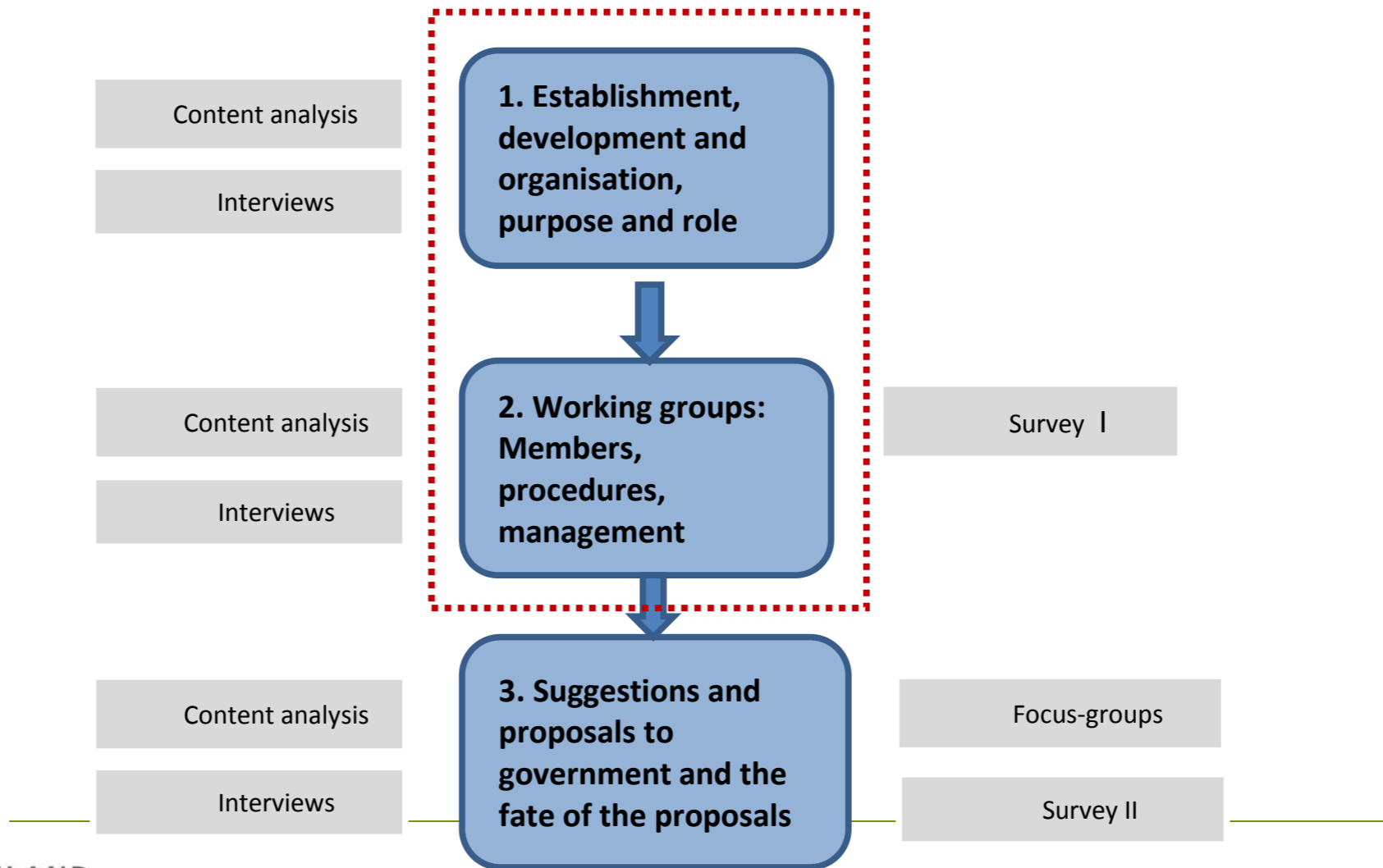
Qualitative data - Overview

- In-depth interviews
- Focus-group interviews
- Content analysis





Project outline





Evaluation of the Welfare Watch ESTABLISHMENT AND ORGANISATION





Establishment of the Welfare Watch

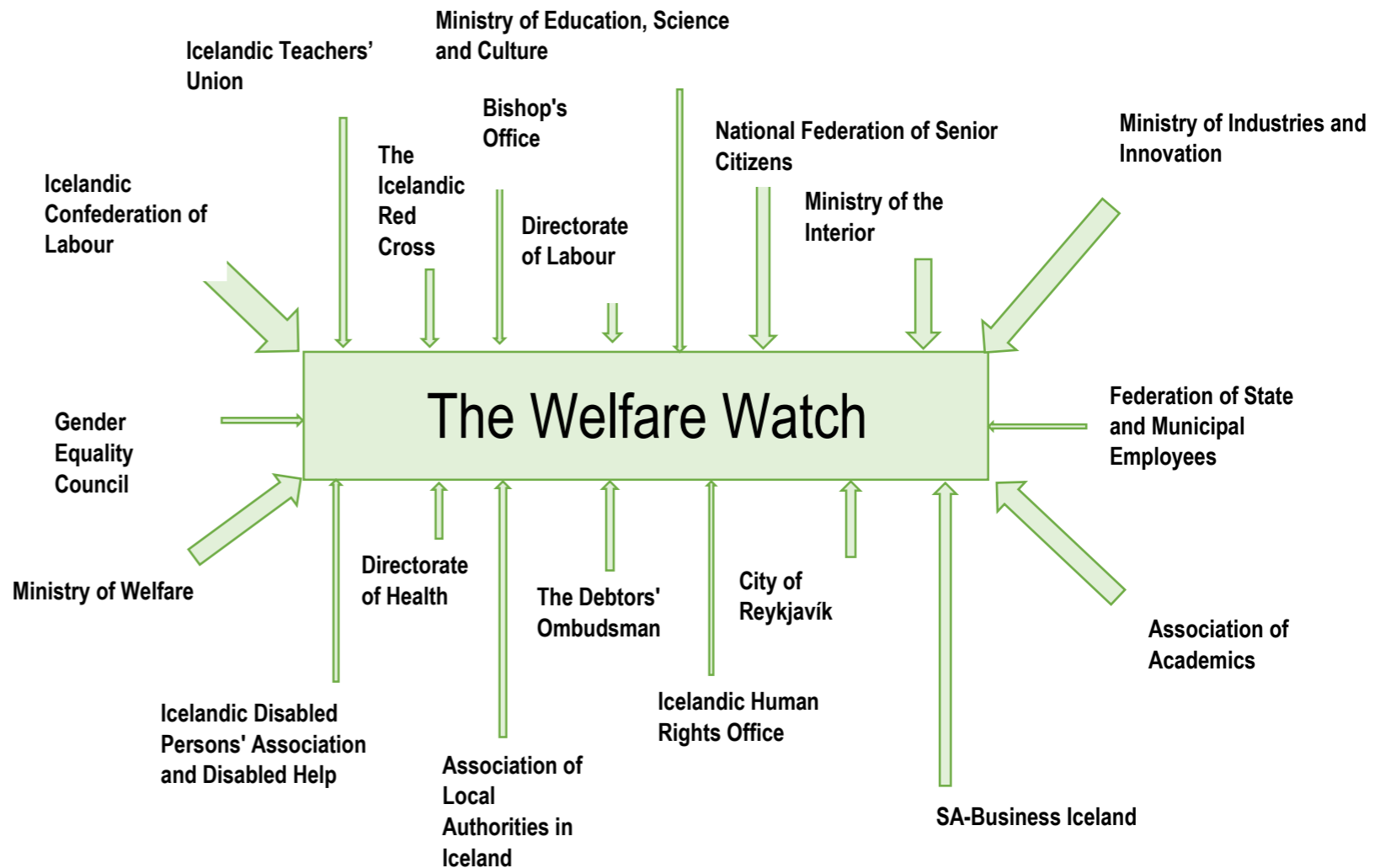
- Set up by the government in February 2009
- Lára Björnsdóttir, appointed Chairman
- Ingibjörg Broddadóttir and Þorbjörn Guðmundsson, employees of the watch
- Completed operation in December 2013





The steering group

- Contact was made with public bodies, companies and NGOs requesting their participation in the Welfare Watch by means of a formal letter
- Steering group consisted of 15 members in the beginning but had become 22 members by December 2014





*I think it was right to have many people around the table and to include not just the public sector but also independent organisations and others involved in welfare matters
[Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir, former Minister for Social Affairs and Social Security]*

*Everybody replied. The line was drawn and everybody responded in the most positive way. Right from day one. That was what was so unbelievable. Maybe it was because the foundations were there; everybody was desperate and afraid
[Lára Björnsdóttir, former Chair of the Welfare Watch]*



Steering group – organisation and management

- Meetings were held fortnightly for two hours
- In meetings the activities of the working groups were discussed, work performed by group members were presented and insight and expertise from people outside the Welfare Watch was gained
- Democratic working practices: All members of the steering group had to approve recommendations and resolutions





It was not necessarily the chairman who said, „Now we will look at this, and it will be worked like this.“ It was a very dynamic and broad steering committee who came up with a number of suggestions about what would be focused on at any given time [a member of the steering committee]



Working groups

- Working groups were created around specific issues
- Goals of working groups: Assess the consequences of the financial crisis on the group in question and propose improvements for the use of the steering committee in its interim reports to the government
- Groups chaired by members of the steering group
 - field of interest and expert knowledge of each governed which group each chaired
- Chairs of groups selected people into the working groups
 - recruited professionals and affiliates they felt belonged to the group





Working groups - overview

- Suðurnes Watch – collaborative working group on welfare in the Suðurnes region
 - Group on social indicators
 - Financial difficulties of households
 - Children and families with children
 - Youngsters and young adults
 - Persons at risk both before and after the crash
 - The unemployed
 - Public health group
 - Merged group: The unemployed and young people
 - The recession and health
 - Basic services group
-





Personally, I found it very positive, that there was so much focus on families with children and poverty because..., we can use Finland as an example, by not looking at it [poverty and families], we are just creating problems for the future [representative of the steering committee].

They took the children as the focus point and worked with it a great deal, and it, of course, hit close to home. I strongly agreed with it; I found it to be a very exciting approach for the Welfare Watch to examine all the issues from the impact on children in the community [Guðbjartur Hannesson, former Minister of Welfare].



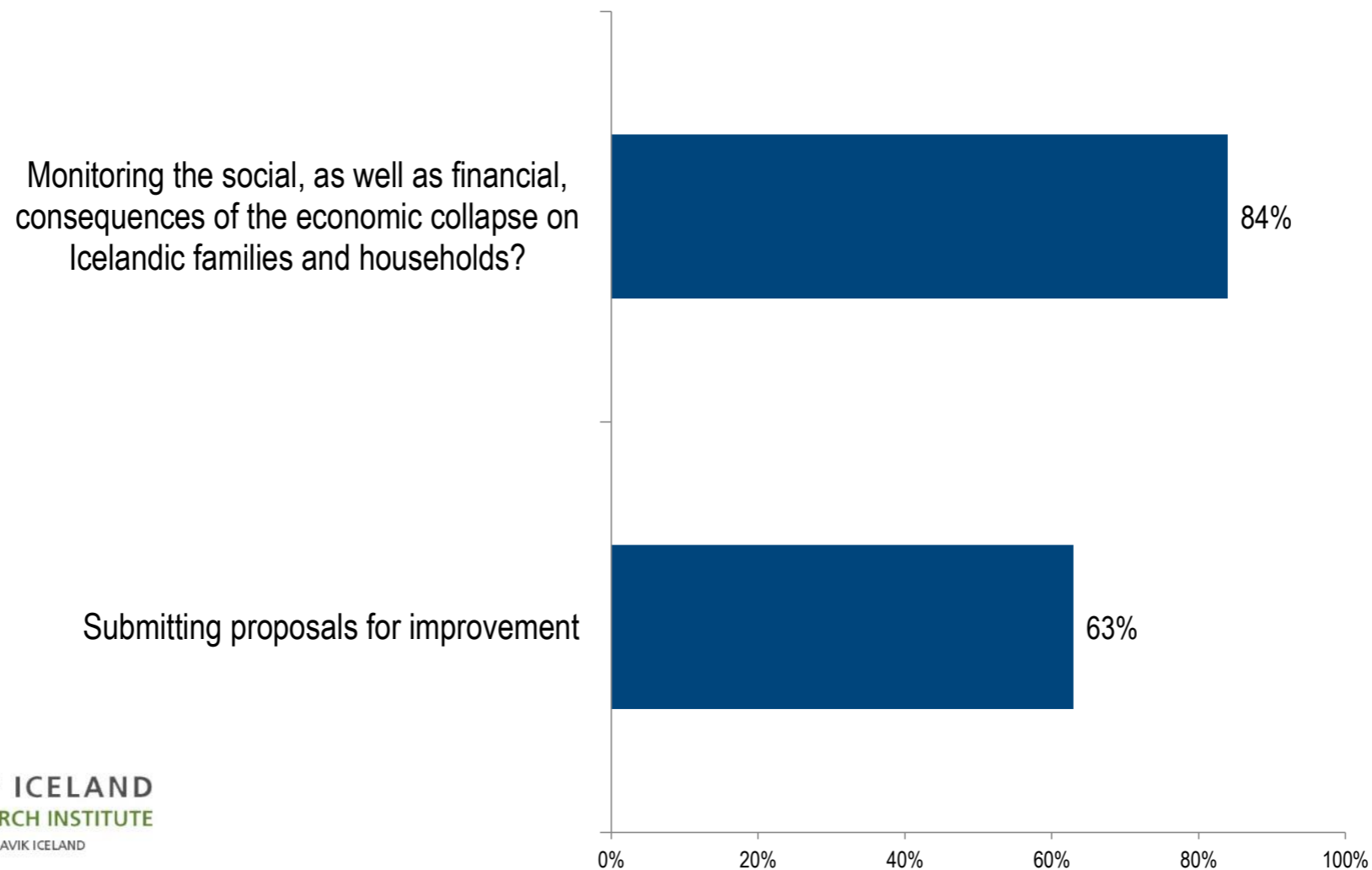
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ROLE AND PURPOSE



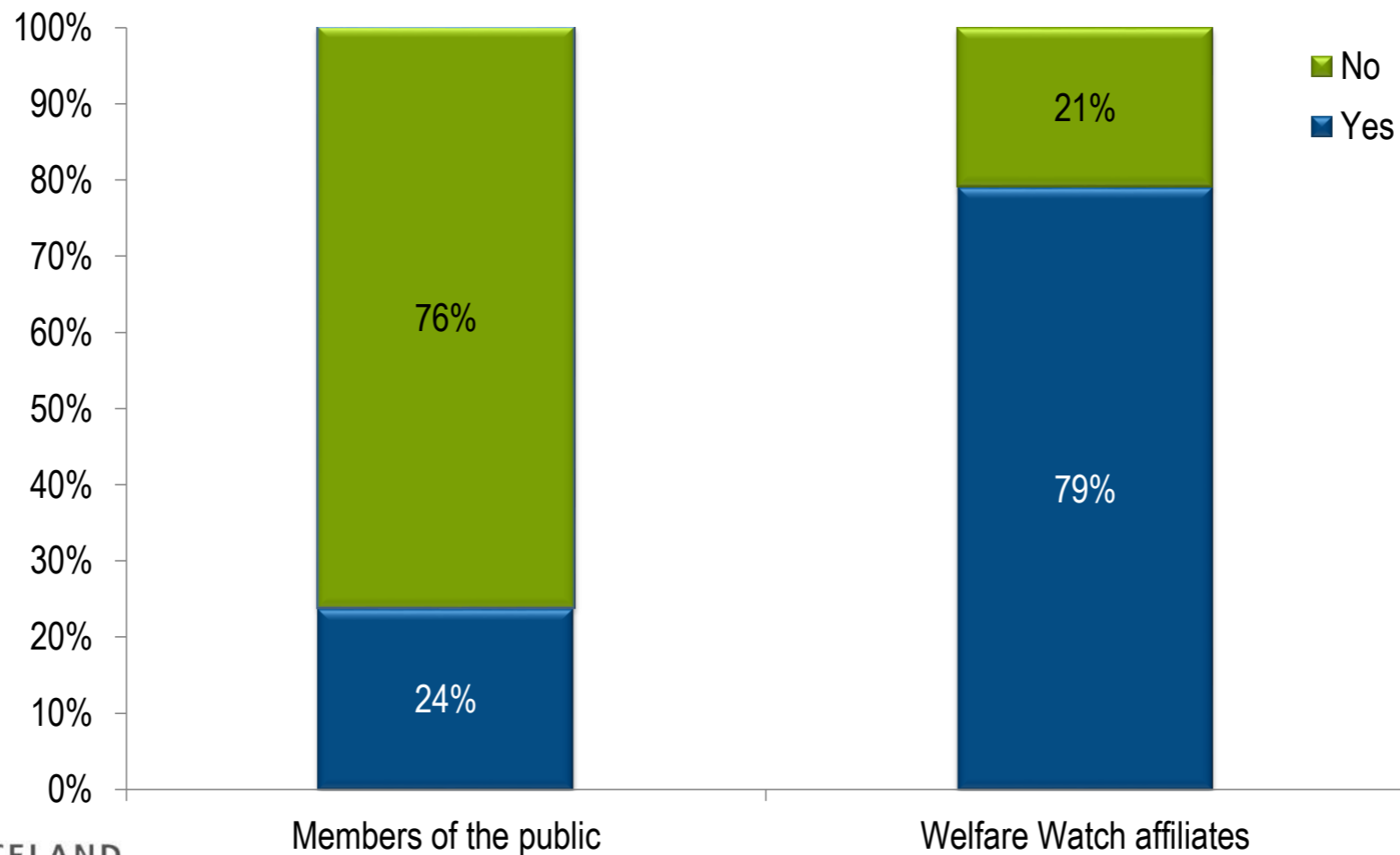


How well or poorly has the Welfare Watch achieved its goal? (% of working groups that said fairly well or very well)





Have you heard about the Welfare Watch?

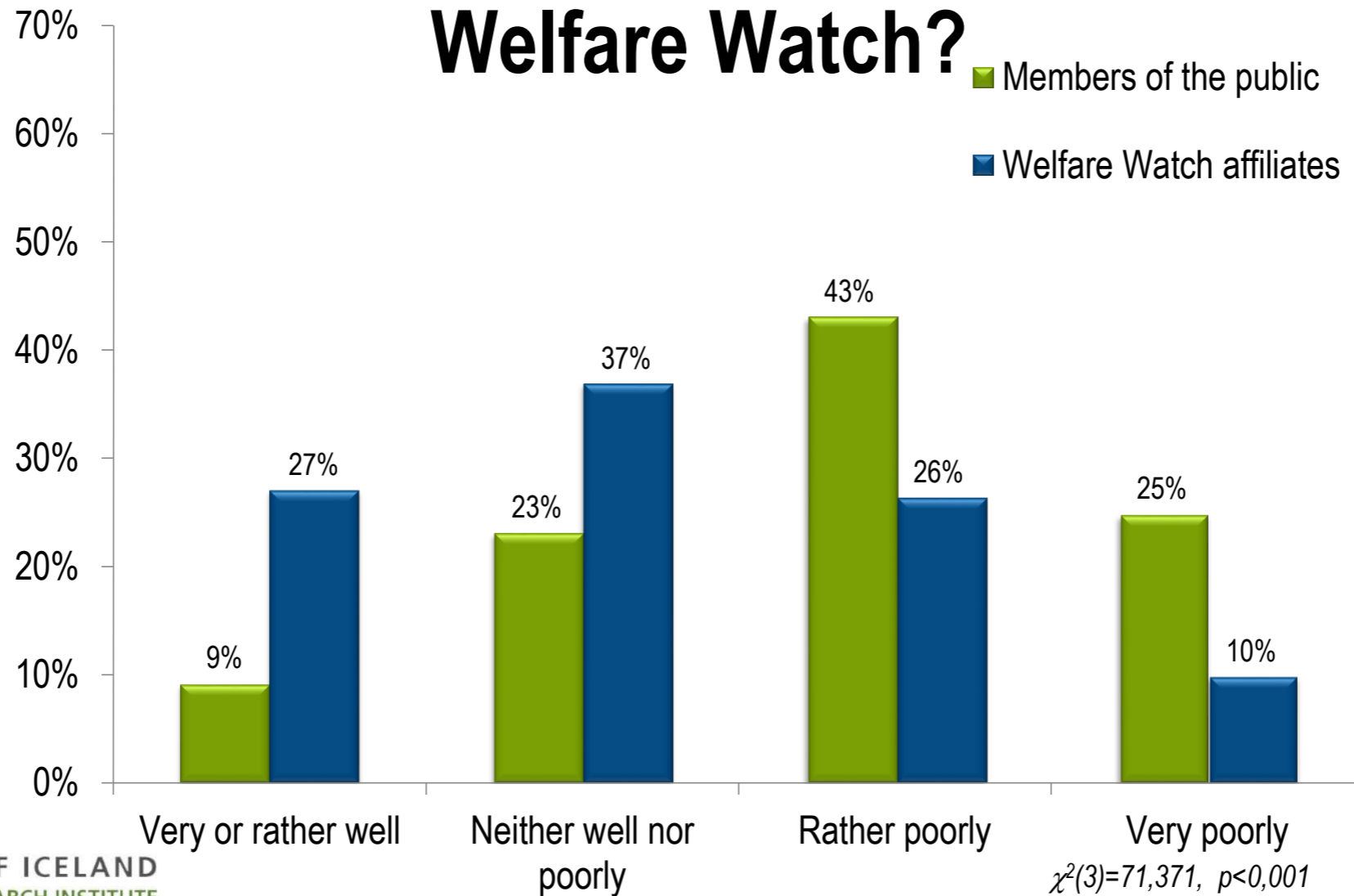


$\chi^2(1)=486,771, p<0,001$





How familiar or unfamiliar are you with the work of the Welfare Watch?



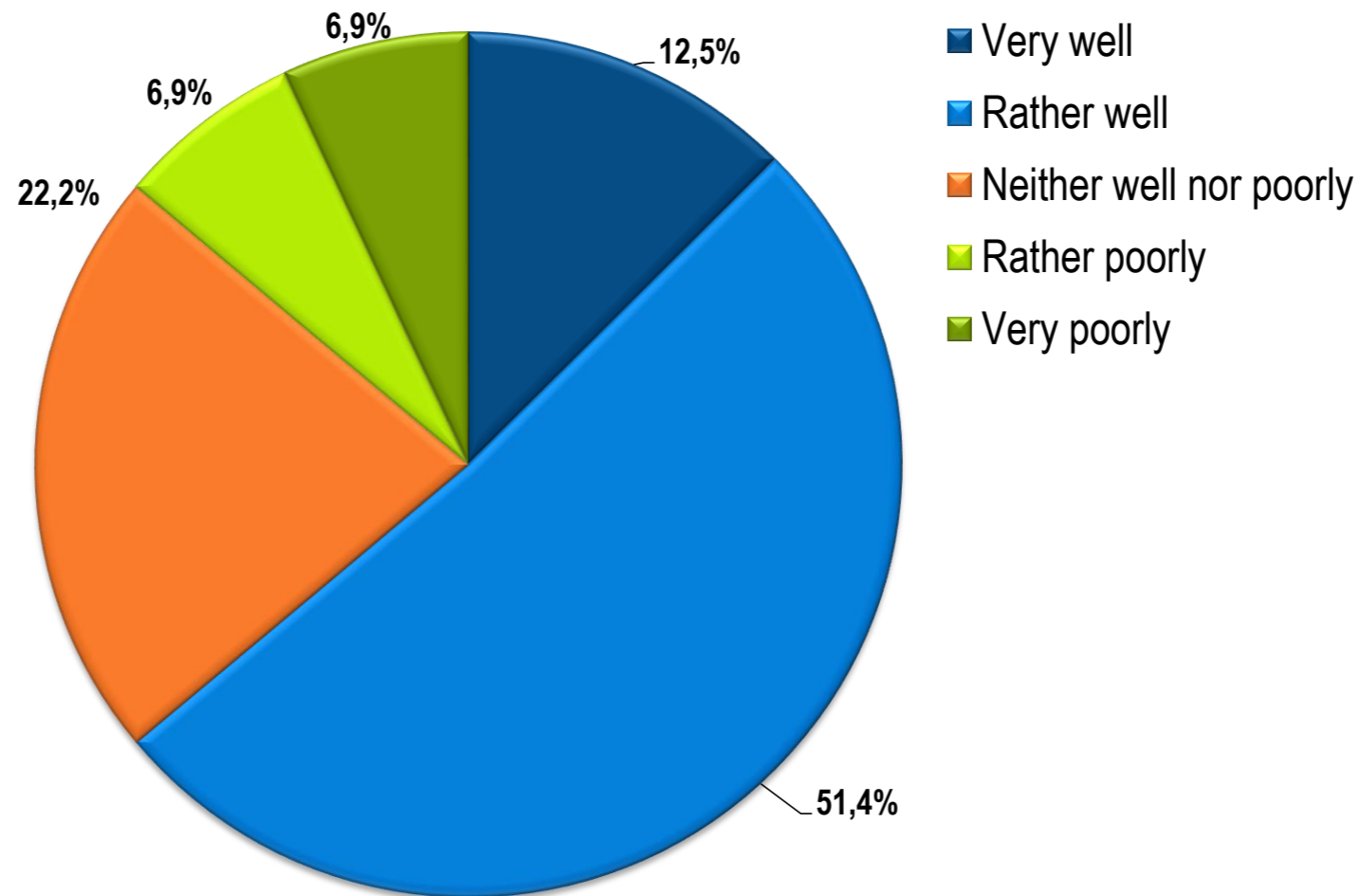


Evaluation of the Welfare Watch WORKING GROUPS



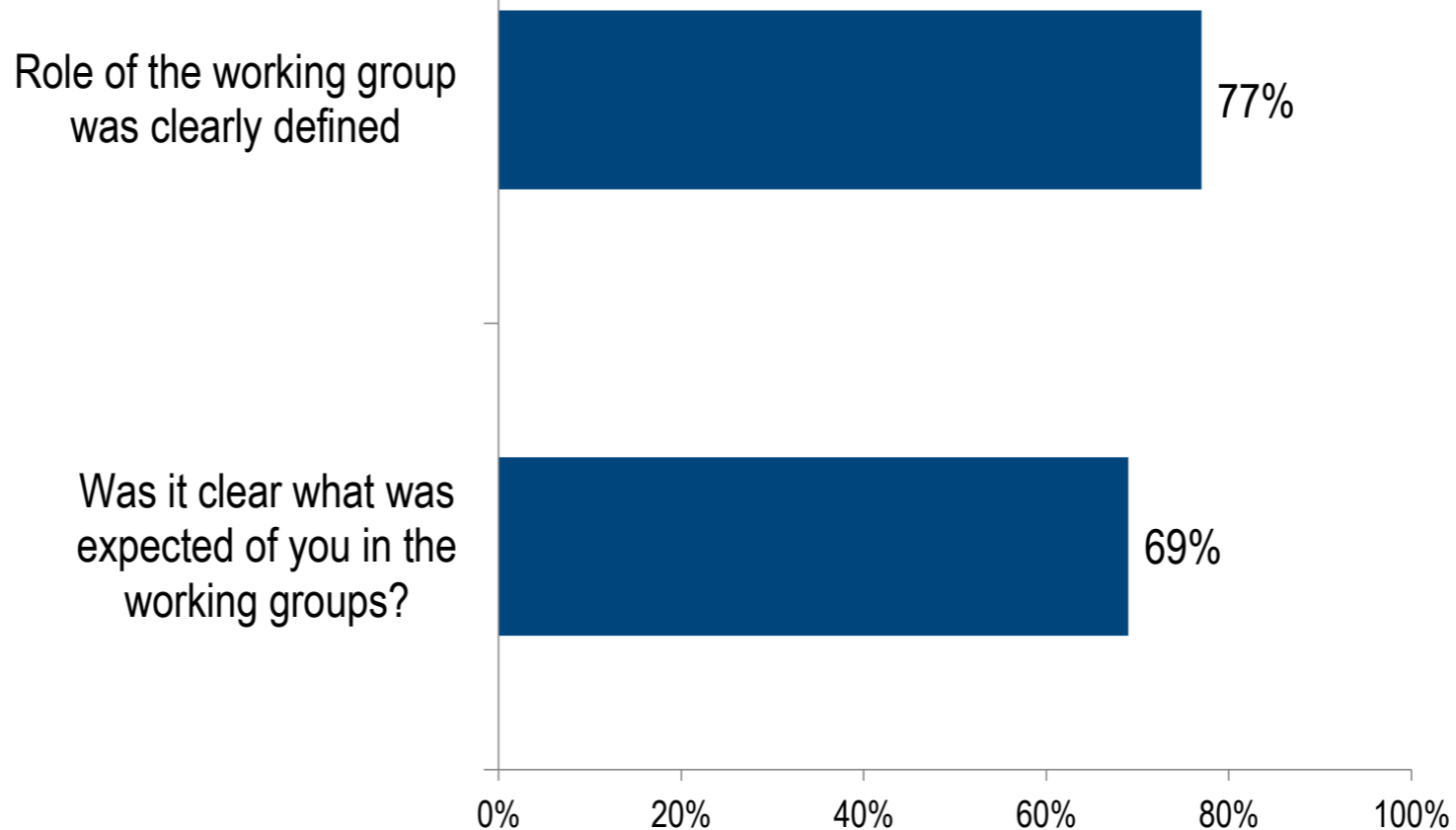


How well or poorly do you feel the objectives that the working group set itself were achieved?





Role of working group and members of groups (% of working groups that said always or almost always)





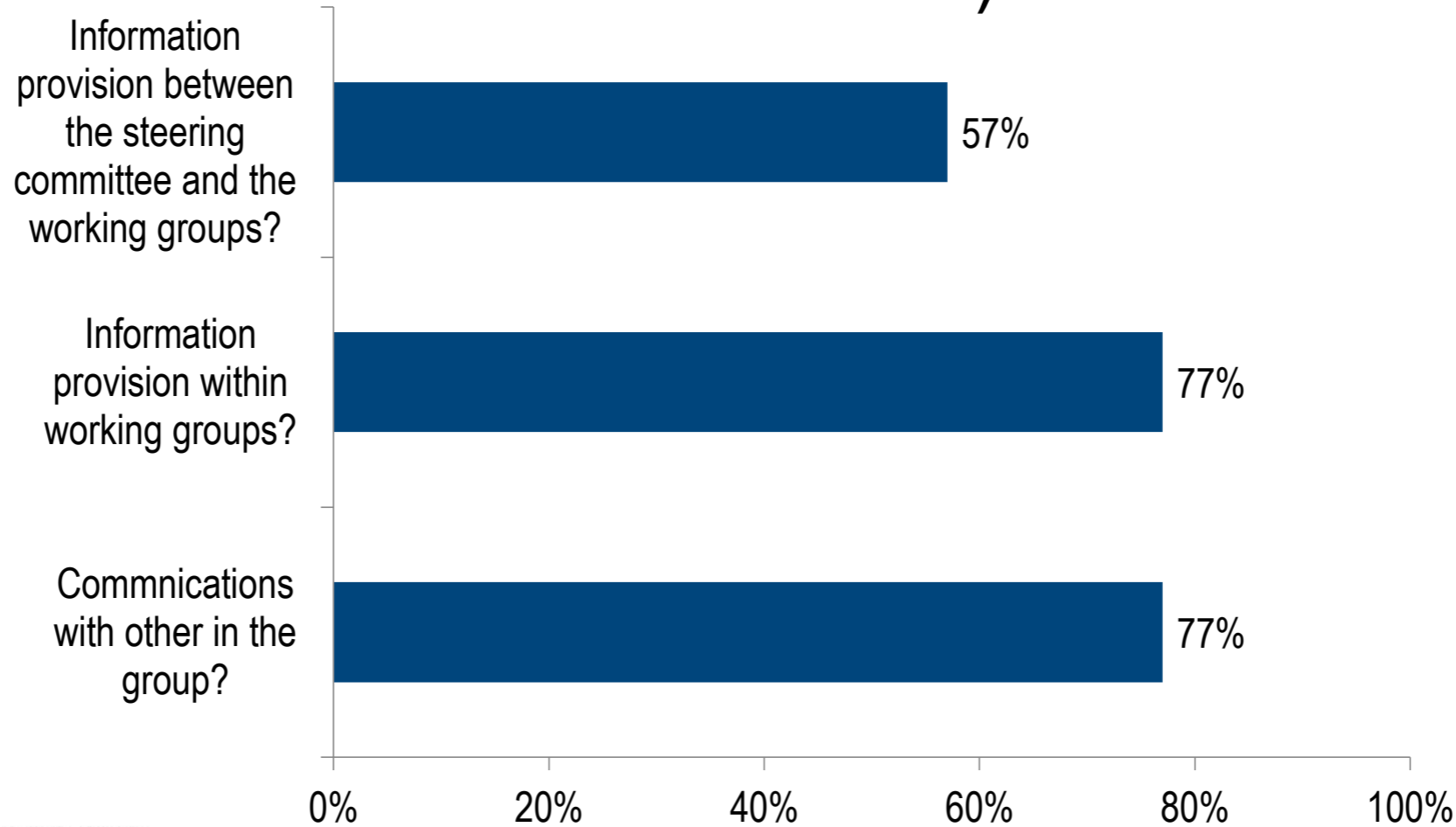
I strongly agree that the overall objectives were both clear, noble and very good. [...but] there was perhaps a certain insecurity or unhappiness within the group because we didn't really know what was expected of us, how we should deliver it and what the time limits were; yes, that is what it was like. We felt the objectives were rather vague [representative of the working group].

It was good to have a dedicated network that meets regularly and takes the pulse of society, but what is it meant to deliver? [representative of the working group]



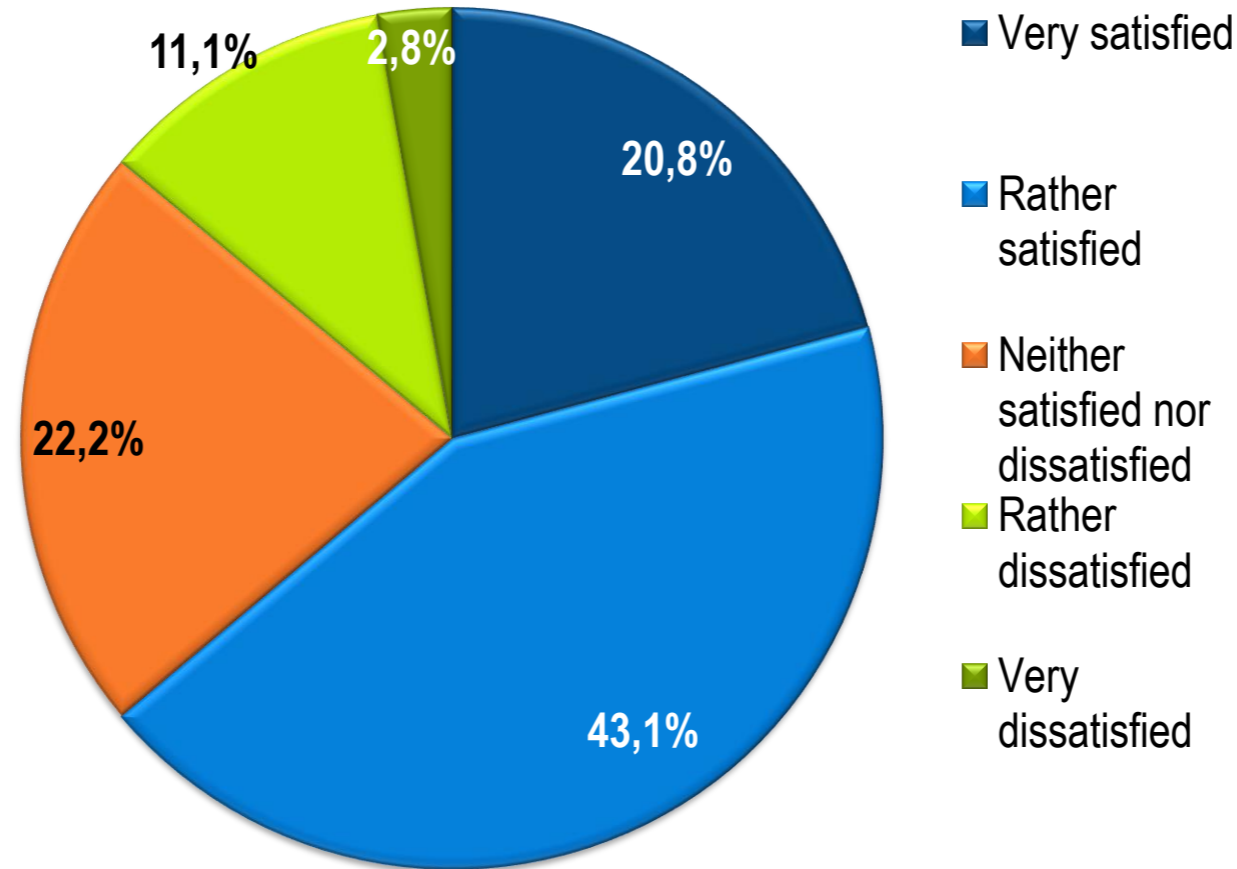


Information flow and co-operation (% that was very or rather satisfied)





On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with working-group efforts?





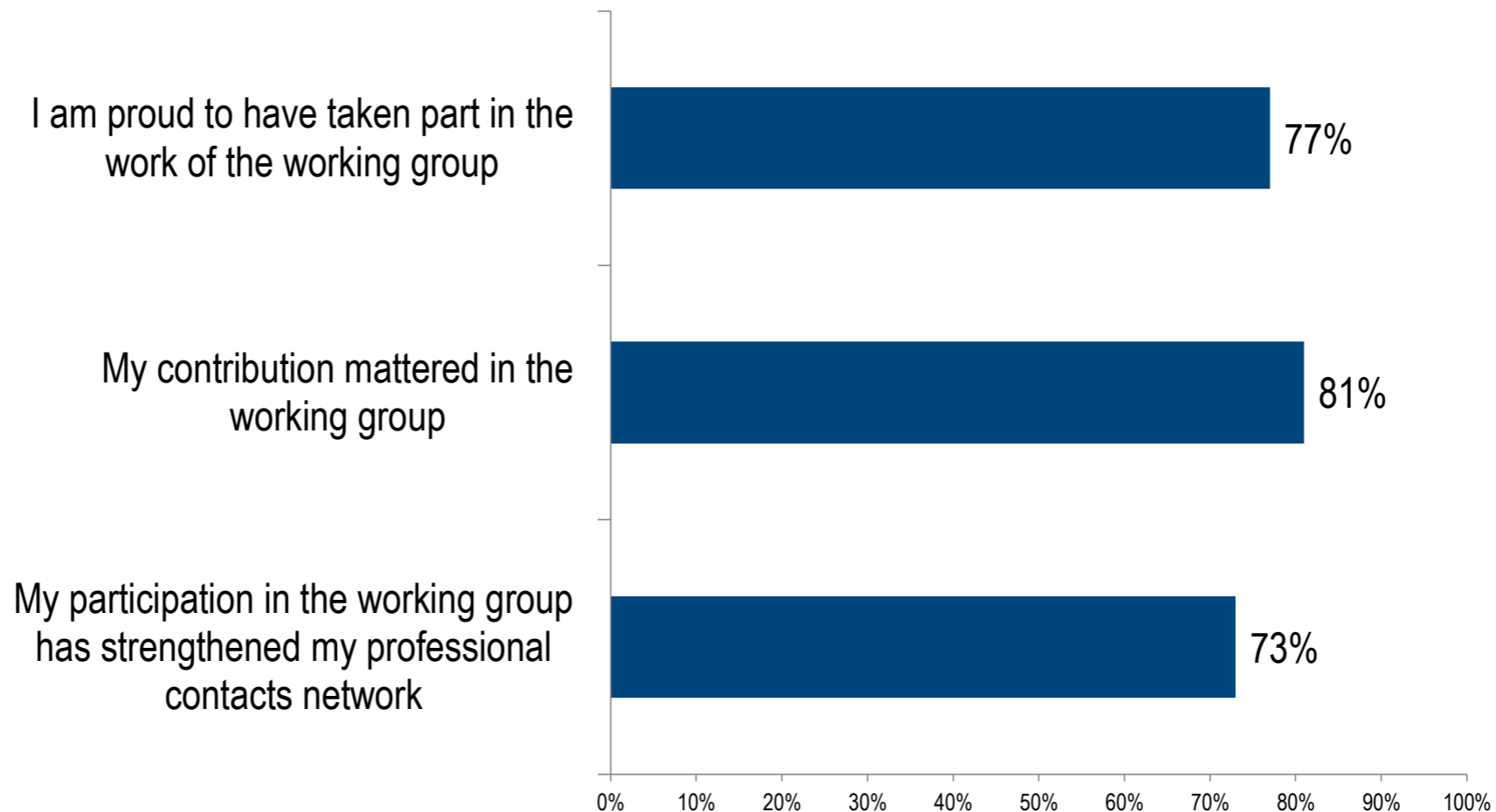
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IMPORTANCE OF THE WELFARE WATCH





The importance of the Welfare Watch





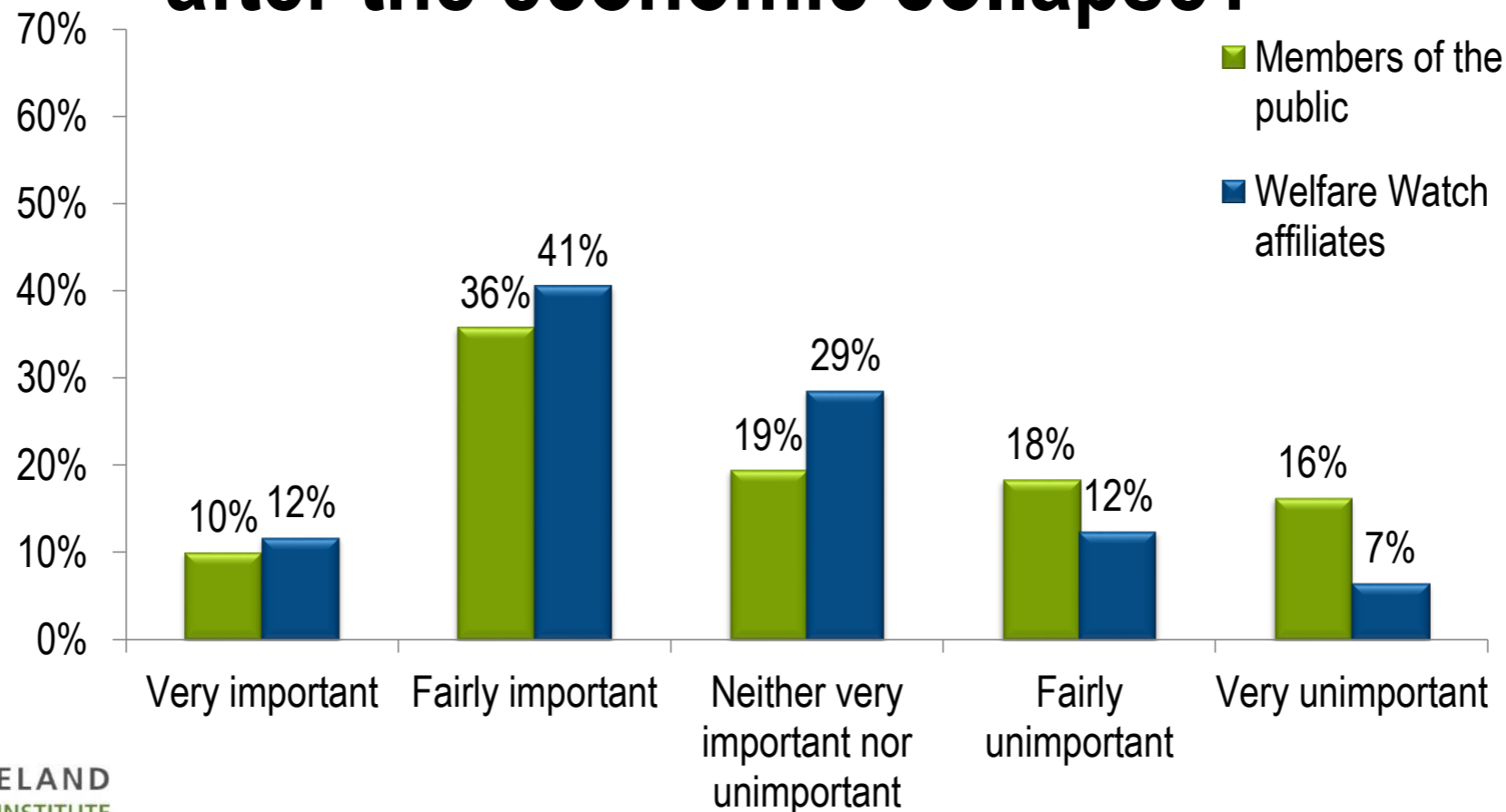
It was important to try and identify where we could best utilise any surplus we could create. Are there cut backs that should not be made, or if there is any possibility of increasing funds, where would the money be best spent? Where would the money be most effective? [Árni Páll Árnason, former Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security]

The advantage to the ministry was that there, you had a large pool of human resources and a tremendous value from all these groups. You had a representative from all these groups, who provided manpower, to examine and share information [...]. You could never buy this work [Guðbjartur Hannesson, former welfare minister]





Do you think that the Welfare Watch was of great or little importance for Icelandic society during the first few years after the economic collapse?



$\chi^2(4)=17,736, p<0,01$





Strengths

- *“All this work, the extensive exchange of ideas that occurred, will have a much greater long-term effect than we realise because it educated everyone involved in the Welfare Watch” [member of the steering committee]*
- Ministers were pleased with the operation of the Welfare Watch
 - Where should funds be directed?
 - Provided government access to information from people that came from various backgrounds
- Various public bodies and organisations worked together on welfare issues in this cross-discipline project. This cross-discipline co-operation played a crucial role in efforts to improve the situation of people in Iceland following the economic recession





Future challenges

- Information flow between the Welfare Watch (steering group) and working groups could have been better
- Define roles for members of working groups more clearly
- *We could have an opinion and make suggestions, but there were no guarantees that they would be implemented. [...] I really wanted to just go in and talk to the minister face to face, say, my friend, such is the situation, as politicians what are you going to do? [representative of the steering committee]*





...important to ensure ongoing operations of the Welfare Watch

One has worked in welfare services during times of economic prosperity and seen that such prosperity does not always reach everyone. This is why there is always a need for something to point out to the authorities existing problems and shortcomings in the welfare services even if everything appears to be going swimmingly for the majority. Then it is important to have individuals and such a body that knows what is going on [Ásta Ragnheiður Jóhannesdóttir, former Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security]





Thank you!

Vala Jónsdóttir
Project Manager at SSRI

valajons@hi.is

Ásdís A. Arnalds
PhD student and Project Manager at SSRI

aaa1@hi.is

Dr. Guðbjörg Andrea Jónsdóttir
Director of SSR

gudbjorg@hi.is

