



Access Culture

An Indigo Share: Hot Topic. Providing creative and cultural organisations with the audience and visitor insight needed to create truly inclusive experiences

Full Report

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Introduction from Indigo



indigo **Katy Raines**
Founder & CEO

Access Culture aims to explore the experiences of disabled audiences engaging with cultural venues across the UK, to support venues in identifying areas for improvement and creating more welcoming spaces for all.

Whilst our findings show that our sector has led the way for inclusion and accessibility in many areas, they have also uncovered some stark and interesting truths about the availability of culture to disabled people and those with access requirements in the UK.

The findings also present a more nuanced picture of inclusion than we expected. Access initiatives such as captioning and in-venue technology are welcomed by many non-disabled as well as disabled audiences; and young people in particular have greater access requirements than perhaps we anticipated.

We have been able to build up this picture by working with the 85 cultural organisations who shared the survey with their audiences and took the time to ensure that record numbers of disabled people were included. We are also so grateful for the support of our sponsors pointOne EPOS, whose funding has enabled us to offer it free to organisations in the UK, and to the team at *All In* for their help and advice in the survey design and methodology.

Access Culture is one of our Hot Topics, one strand of Indigo Share, the collective approach to audience insight. Powered by the sector, Indigo Share aims to help cultural organisations bring the audience voice into their decision-making, improve communication and increase audience engagement.

Context

Access Culture is a research initiative exploring the experiences of disabled audiences when engaging with cultural venues. The study examines key barriers related to finding information, booking tickets, physical access, confidence in attending, and the use of technology.

Cultural venues strive to be inclusive, but accessibility challenges persist. **This research provides valuable insight into the experiences of disabled visitors, helping organisations better understand their needs and identify areas for improvement.**

By highlighting common barriers and opportunities for change, Access Culture aims to support cultural venues in making their spaces more welcoming and accessible for all.

Methodology

Cultural organisations across the UK, including theatres, museums, galleries, festivals, and heritage sites, were invited to participate in the research. The survey was distributed via **85 cultural organisations**, gathering responses from **over 20,000 audience members**.

Participants were asked about their experiences in finding information, booking tickets, venue accessibility, confidence in attending, and the role of technology in cultural visits.

The findings provide a comprehensive view of accessibility in cultural spaces, offering actionable insights for organisations to enhance visitor experiences.



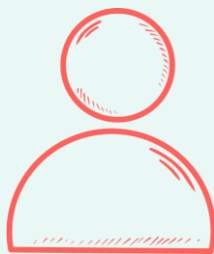
Access Culture: Summary findings

- 1 Finding information** - Disabled visitors are far more likely to check accessibility in advance, yet 71% struggle to find clear information, often due to unclear websites and missing details.
- 2 Booking tickets** - Disabled visitors are nine times more likely to struggle with online booking, with most unable to fully communicate their access needs, leading to frustration and exclusion.
- 3 Physical accessibility** - Seating availability, transport, and physical access remain the biggest barriers, but social, financial, and sensory factors also play a key role in attendance.
- 4 Confidence in attending** - Confidence is a major barrier, with 39% of disabled visitors unsure their needs will be met, and 38% missing cultural events due to accessibility uncertainty.
- 5 Technology use** - While technology is widely used, disabled visitors are more likely to use digital tools like mobile ordering and QR codes but may also face challenges with them.

Respondent and organisation profile

What types of cultural organisations took part?

Which of their audiences and visitors responded to the Access Culture survey?



85 Participating organisations



Location

England - 78
Scotland - 6
Wales - 1



Type

Theatre - 41
Arts Centre - 12
Museum/Gallery - 16
Other - 16

12,709 Validated audience responses

19,504 All audience responses



Profile

56% identified as d/Deaf, disabled, neurodivergent, or with a long-term health condition



Age

10% - under 35
22% - 35 to 54
66% - 55 or over



Frequency

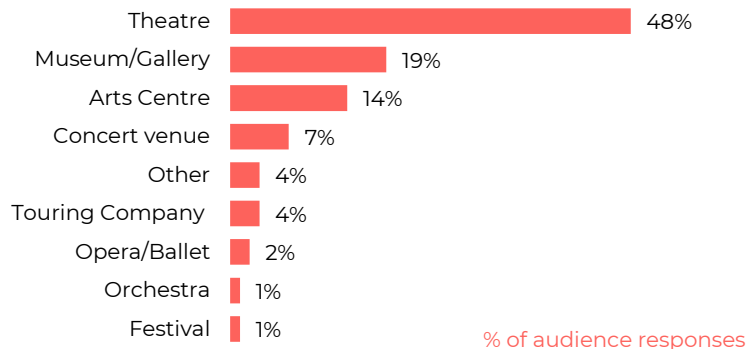
91% attend at least once a month / every few months

Participating organisations: location and types

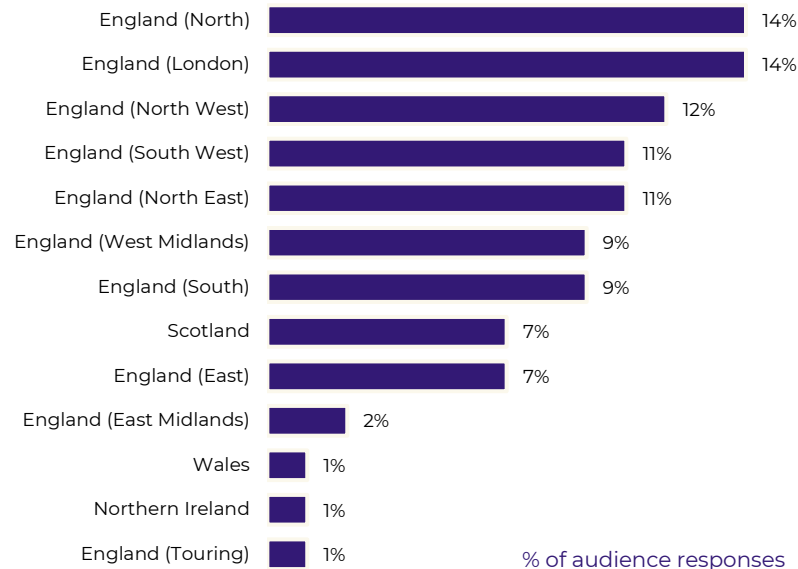
85 Participating organisations

12,709 Audience responses

Types of organisation

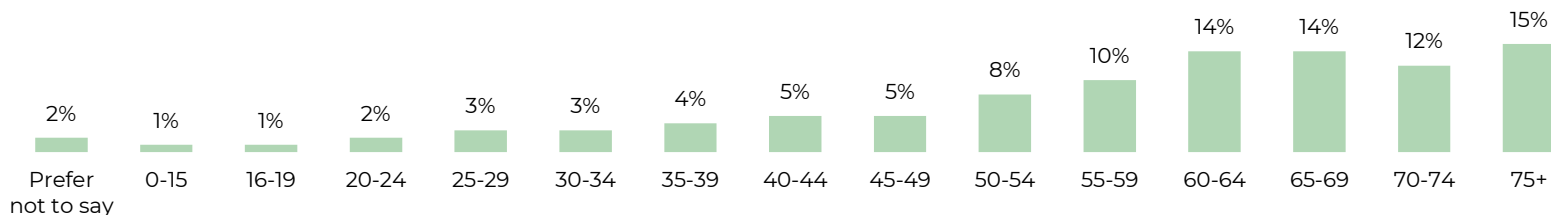


Location

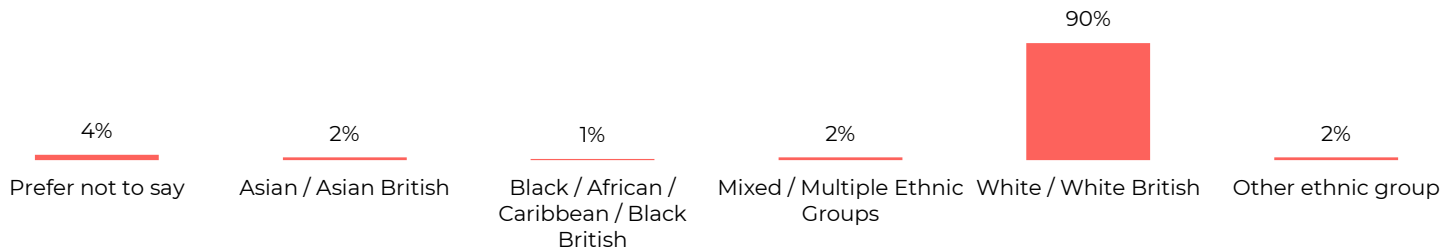


Respondent profile: age and ethnicity

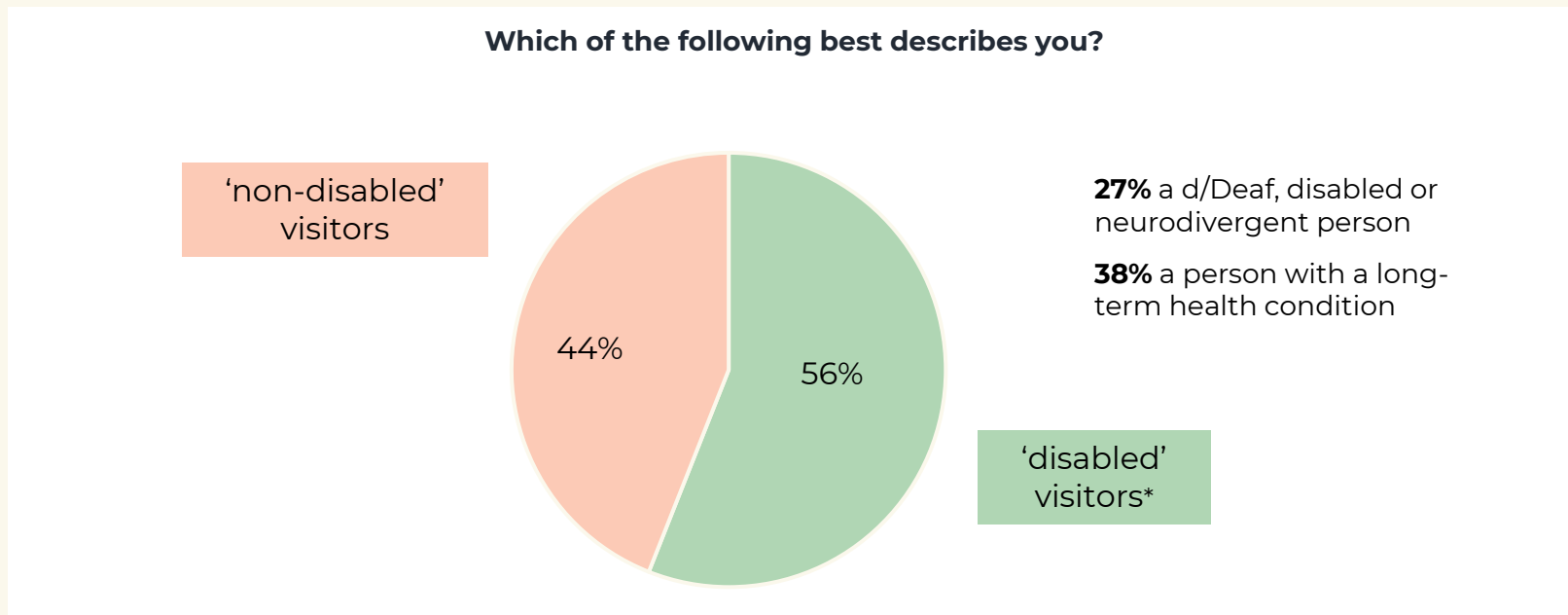
How old are you?



How would you describe your ethnic origin?



Respondent profile: disability



**N.B. For the purposes of this report, the term 'disabled visitors' includes individuals responding on behalf of a disabled person. This definition will be used consistently throughout.*

Access Culture

Full results



Sections

- **Section 1:** Finding and accessing information
- **Section 2:** Booking for cultural events
- **Section 3:** Physical accessibility of cultural venues
- **Section 4:** Confidence in visiting cultural venues
- **Section 5:** Technology in cultural venues

Finding and accessing information



How do disabled visitors
navigate information
about cultural venues?

How do information-
seeking behaviours differ
between disabled and
non-disabled visitors?

Key findings: Finding and accessing information

1

Disabled visitors are far more likely to check accessibility before visiting. 75% always check, compared to just 44% of non-disabled visitors.

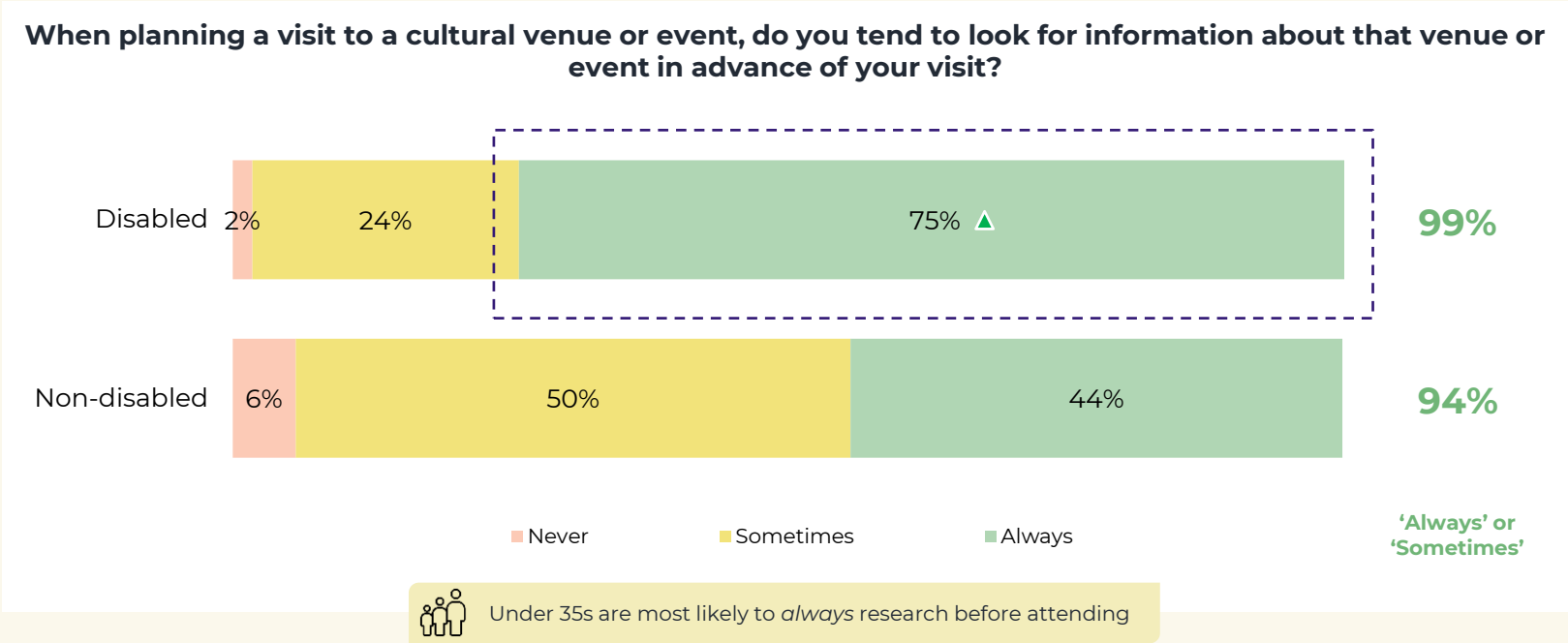
2

71% of disabled visitors struggle to find key venue information, with unclear websites and missing details creating barriers.

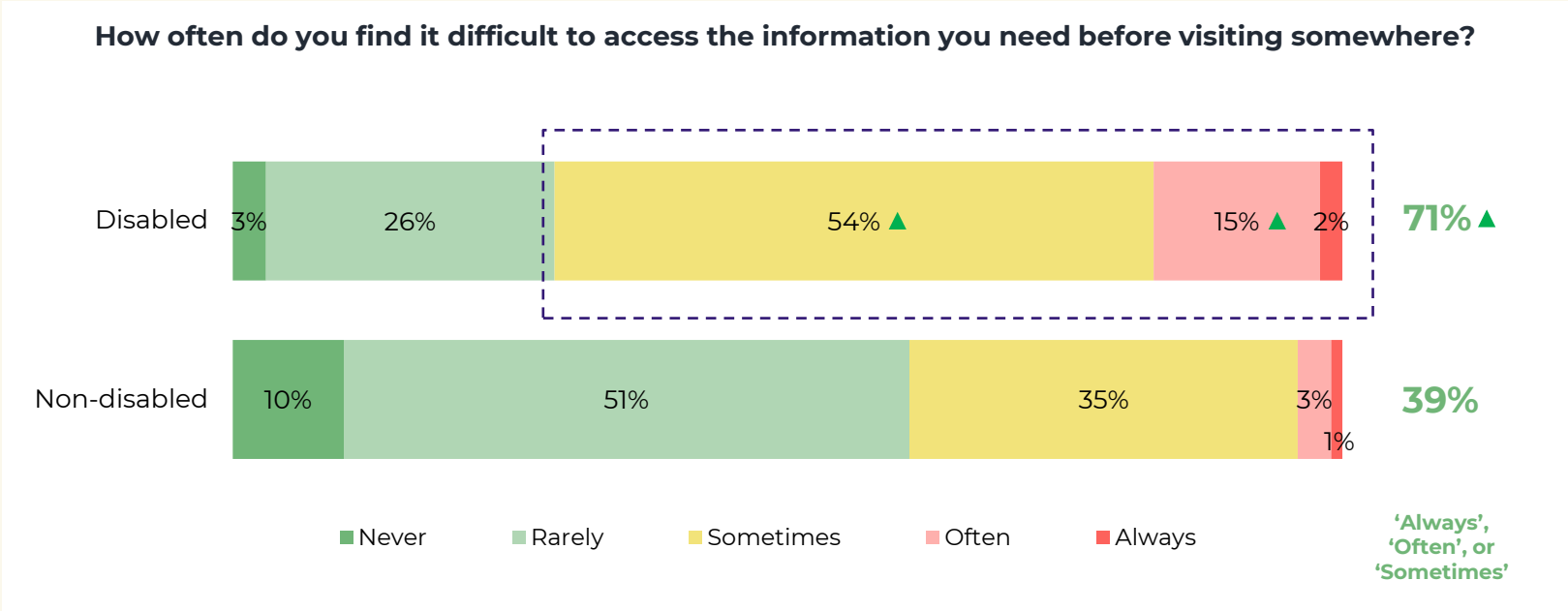
3

Disabled visitors are three times more likely to call venues for information (46% vs 16% non-disabled), often due to gaps in online accessibility details.

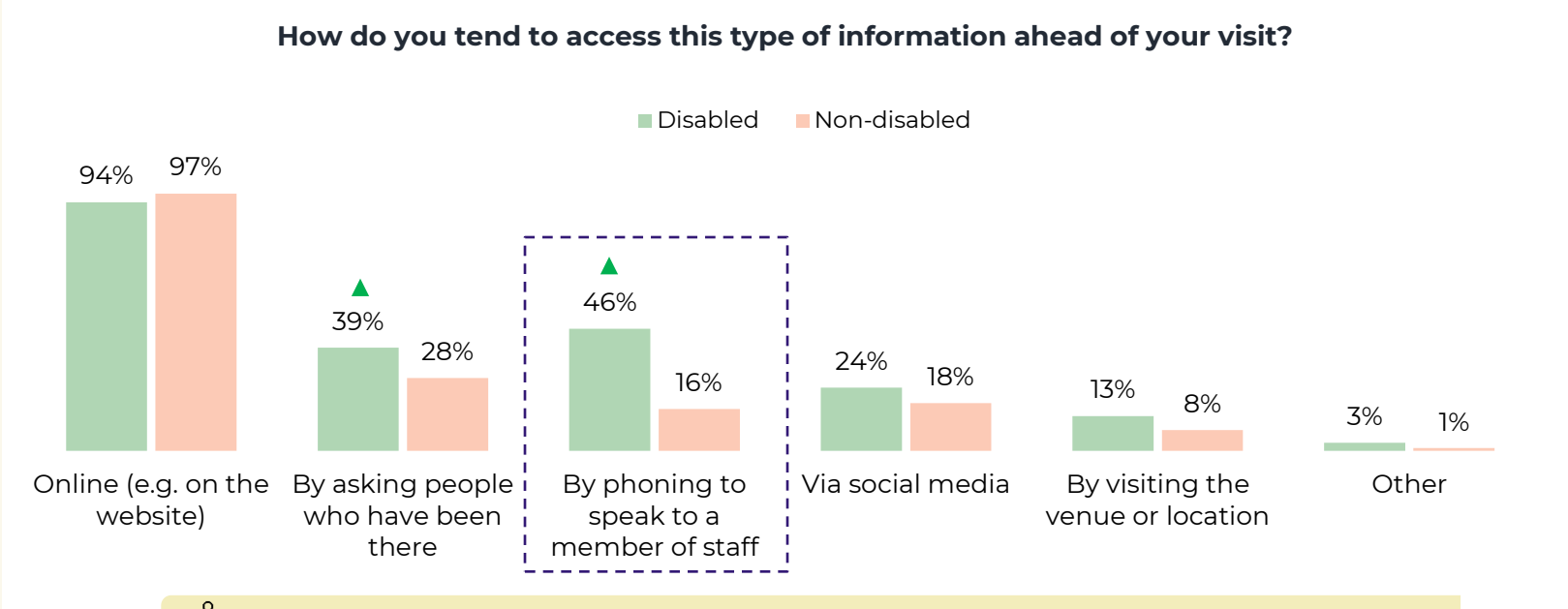
Nearly all visitors research venues before attending; 75% of disabled visitors and 71% of under 35s ALWAYS do so.




...but disabled audiences are significantly more likely to struggle with accessing the information they need before visiting a venue.



...and disabled visitors are **three times** more likely to call venues directly for support.



 55+ are far more likely to call the venue, particularly compared to under 35s who are more likely to use social media

Visitors most often seek information on accessibility, facilities, transport, and event details to plan their visit effectively.

What kinds of information do you tend to look for?



Mobility

Most want to know about **ease of movement**, focusing on step-free access, lifts, ramps, and wheelchair-friendly spaces. Walking distances, handrails, and clear routes also matter.

"Accessibility... e.g. info on steps, ramps, toilets, parking and assistance if needed"



Facilities (Esp. Toilets)

Many seek **accessible toilets, quiet spaces, hydration points, and places to rest**. Some check for baby-changing facilities and gender-neutral toilets.

"Is there seating in gardens for example? Somewhere to rest when needed"



Parking and Transport

Some check for **blue badge parking, proximity to public transport, and parking costs**. Ease of getting from transport or car park to the venue is a key concern.

"How to get there, parking (and back up parking), where I need to go once I'm there"



Event and Venue

Some focus on **seating plans, sightlines, and legroom**. Others check **event duration, intervals, and crowd levels** to ensure a comfortable visit.

"Crowd levels, quieter and less busy parts of the venue, security arrangements... types of seating"

Unclear websites and the inability to get accurate or detailed information create barriers.

What do you find difficult?



Website navigation

Many struggle to find clear, detailed accessibility info.

Overcomplicated, outdated, or poorly signposted websites make planning difficult, leaving visitors unsure about key facilities.

“Over-complicated websites trying hard to look cool. Just keep it simple!”



Staff availability and Knowledge

Getting accurate information is difficult.

Long wait times, automated responses, and untrained staff leave visitors uncertain about accessibility provisions.

“At the venue staff, although helpful and friendly, often don't know about access”

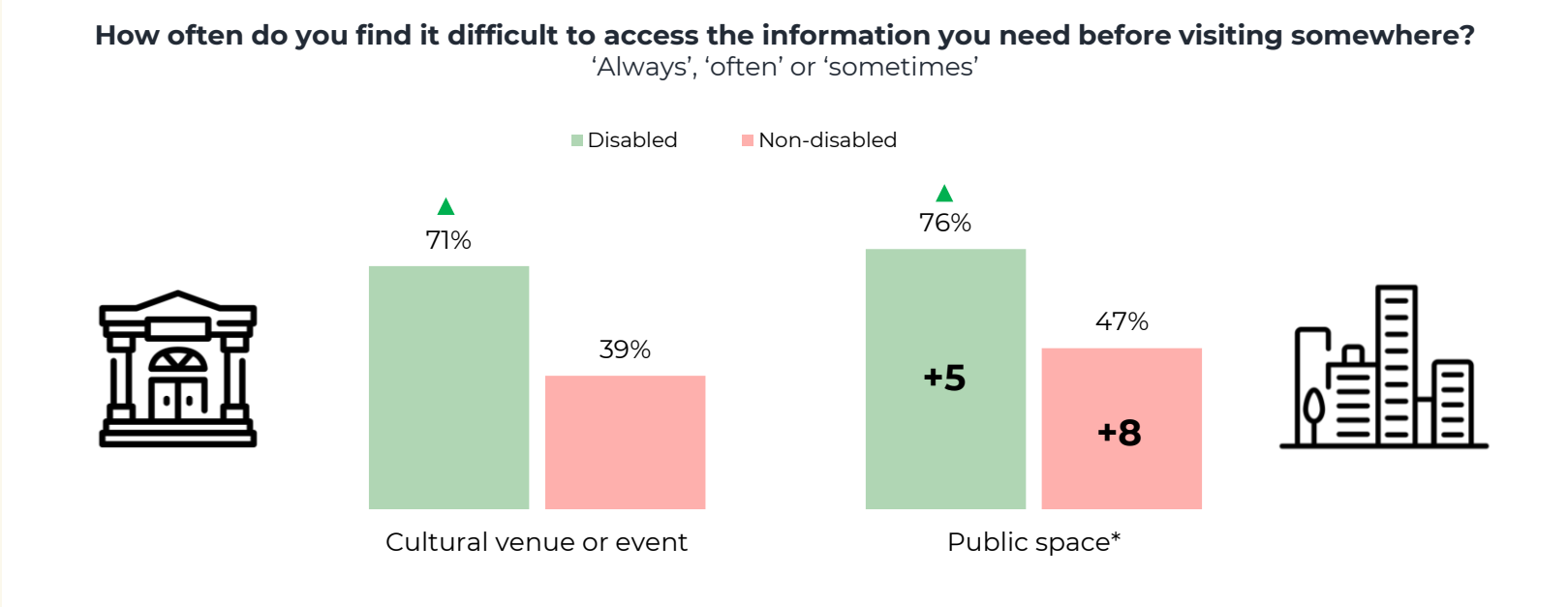


Level of detail

Unclear accessibility and transport information, including **step-free access, seating, toilets, parking, and walking distances**, makes it difficult for audiences to plan visits.

“Finding where things are, parking details or public transport not detailed”

However, cultural venues and events are doing better than other public spaces when it comes to accessing information.



*N.B. This is an average across ratings for taxis, trains, hotels, restaurants, grocery deliveries, and visitor attractions.

Booking for cultural events



Are online booking systems effectively meeting the needs of disabled visitors?

Key findings: Booking for cultural events

1

Disabled visitors are nearly 9 times more likely to struggle with online booking (17% vs 2% non-disabled).

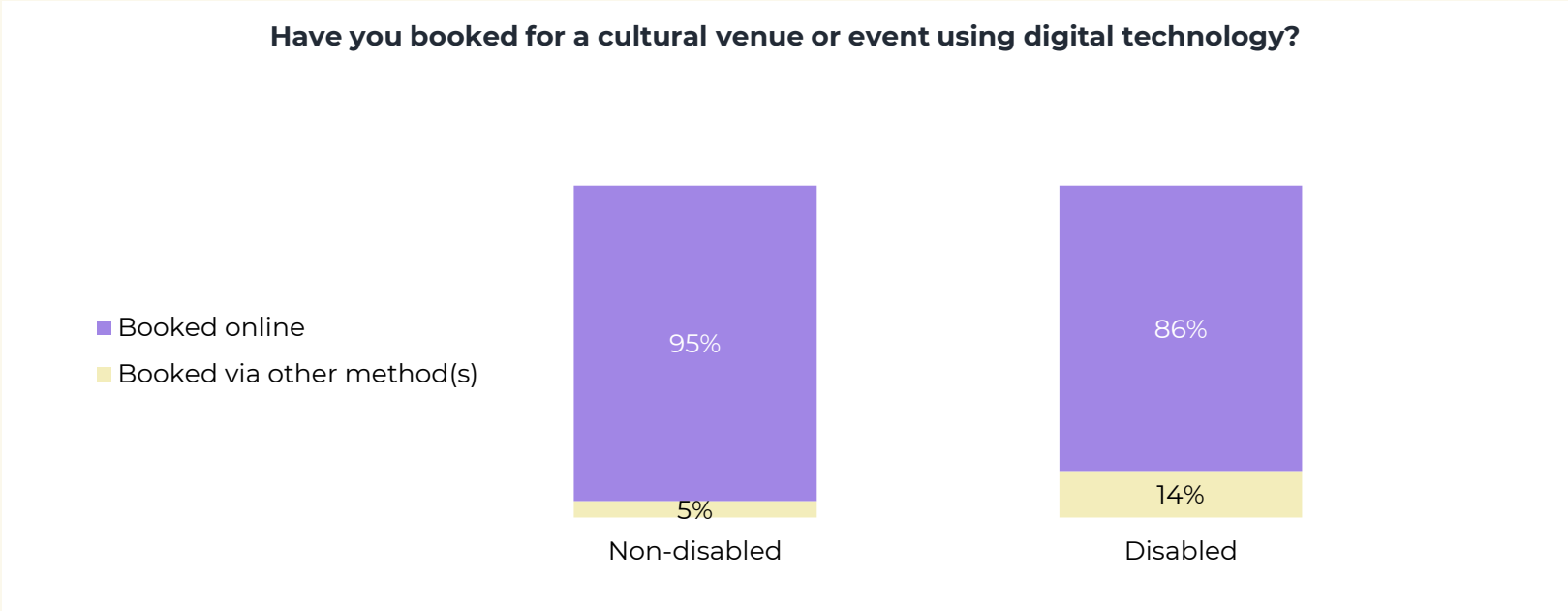
2

Only 9% of disabled visitors say booking systems fully allow them to state their access needs, leaving most without a clear way to communicate essential requirements.

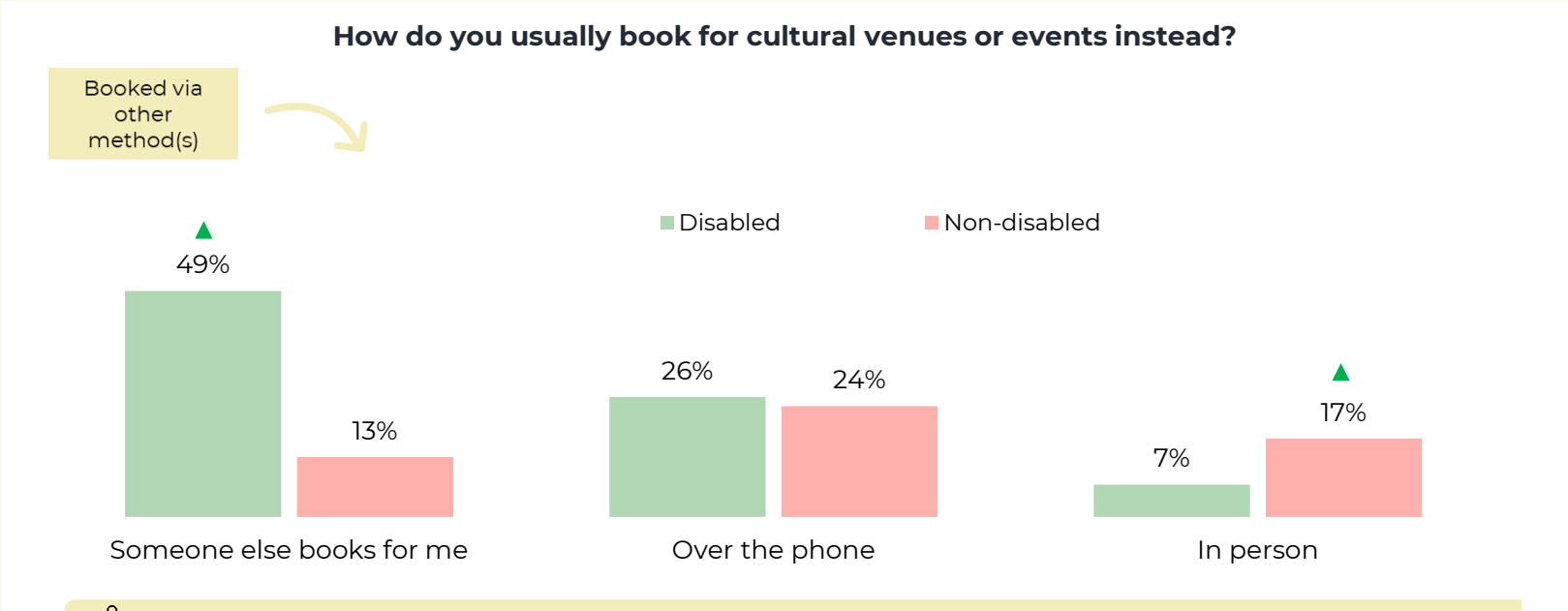
3

One in four disabled visitors find it difficult to prove eligibility for accessible tickets (25%), with inconsistent processes creating frustration and exclusion.

Most visitors book using digital technology; however, the rate is 9%pts lower among disabled visitors compared to non-disabled visitors



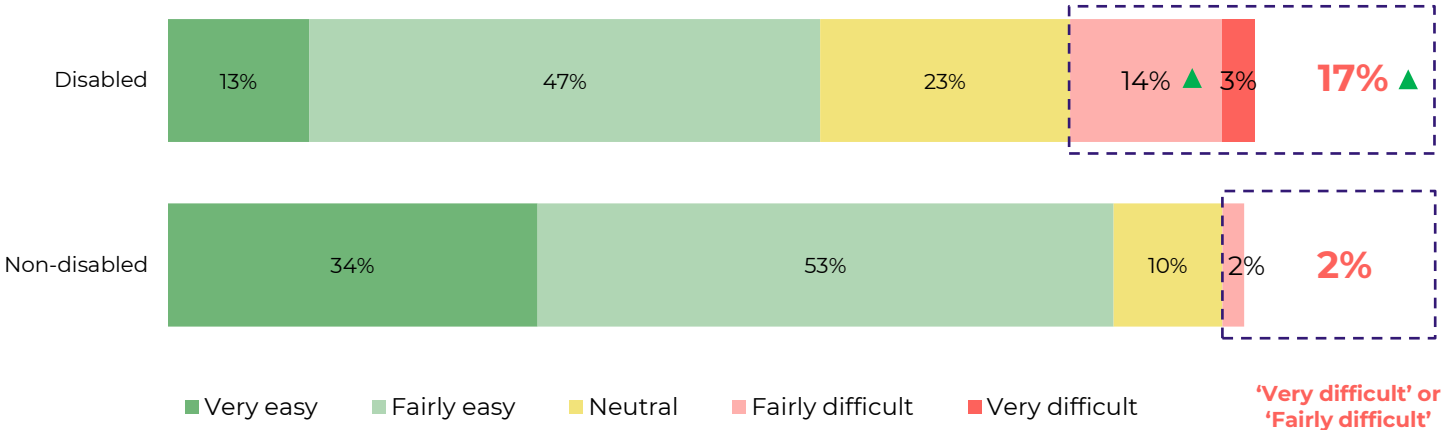
Nearly half of disabled visitors who **do not** book digitally rely on others, with the highest reliance among under-35s.



Under 35s mostly rely on others to book, while older groups are more split between booking through others and calling the venue

Disabled visitors are nine times more likely to find booking online very or fairly difficult.

In general, how easy do you find the online booking process for cultural venues and events?



Unclear processes, inaccessible websites, and limited support increase the challenge of having access needs met.

Do you have anything you want to tell us about your experiences of booking for cultural venues or events?



Inability to Book Accessible Seats

Many venues **require phone bookings for wheelchair and companion seats**, while non-disabled customers can book online. Accessible ticketing schemes exist but are not widely accepted.

“Most venues do not allow you to book a wheelchair space online. This means disabled people have to make a phone call during working hours to get tickets”



Inconsistent Booking Processes

Venues have **different rules for proof of disability, carer tickets, and accessible seating**. Some allow online booking with pre-registered access accounts, while others require calls, leading to confusion and delays.

“Access rules are different everywhere so sometimes it is hard as I have to go through the whole process of explaining requirements.”



Poor Website Functionality

Many **websites lack clear accessibility info, are glitchy, or are hard to navigate**. Limited booking time, unclear seat details, and small fonts create barriers, especially for visually impaired or neurodivergent users.

“Level of difficulty in booking relates to how good the website is rather than the ability of the booker to negotiate it!”

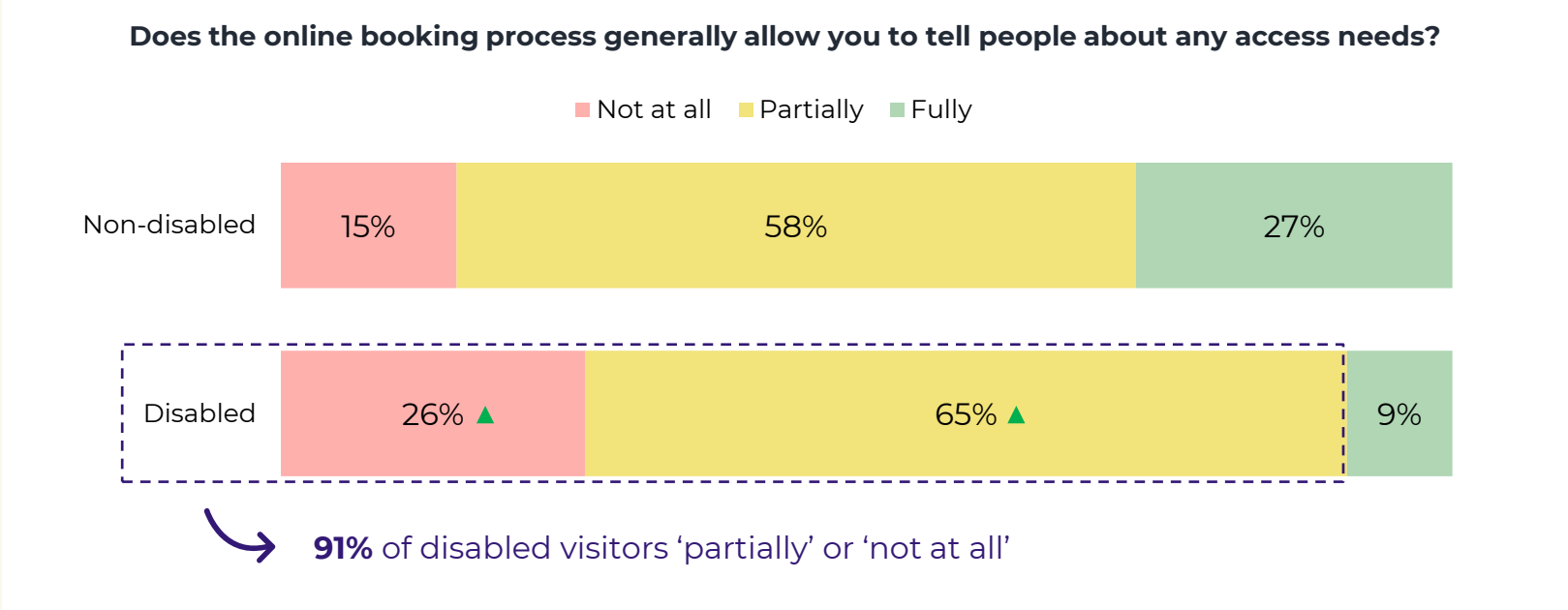


Lack of Direct Support

Contacting venues is often difficult, **with long phone wait times, slow or ignored emails, and automated responses**. Third-party agents may lack accessibility knowledge, making it harder to secure suitable seats.

“Emails requesting info / advising on needs are answered days or weeks later or ignored”

Overall, three quarters of visitors feel they cannot fully communicate their access needs during booking; this increases to 9 in 10 for disabled visitors.



Many find the process inconsistent, intrusive, and time-consuming, particularly for those with non-visible disabilities.

Do you have anything you want to tell us about your experiences of booking for cultural venues or events?



Burden of proving eligibility

Many respondents feel the **process of proving their eligibility is excessive, intrusive, and inconsistent** across venues, leading to frustration and exclusion.

"I find it frustrating the additional admin and financial outlay that is required to be part of programs"



Inconsistency across venues and schemes

Different venues require different types of proof, **making the process complex and time-consuming**, often preventing spontaneous attendance.

"There are different cards and not a universal method of telling people"



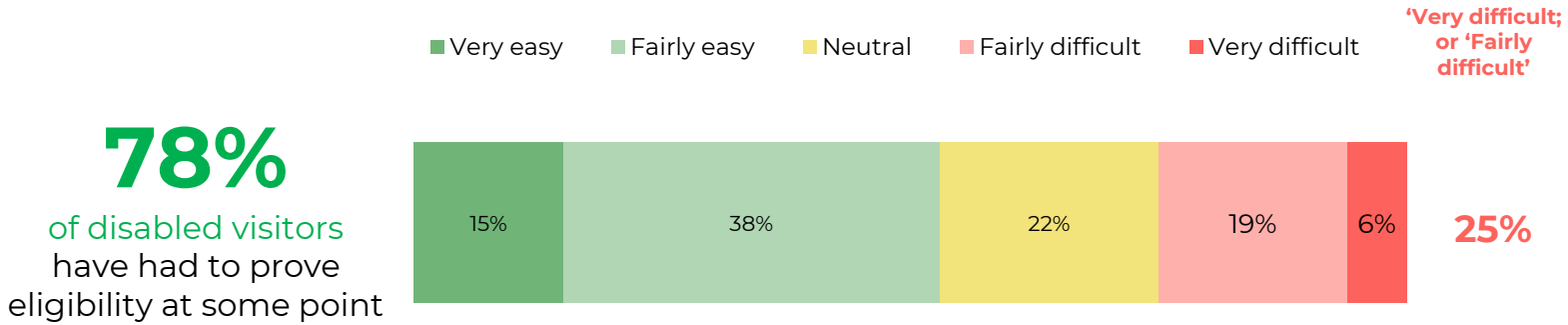
Poor recognition for non-visible disabilities

Those with non-visible disabilities often **face disbelief, repeated scrutiny, or lack of suitable proof options**, making it harder to access appropriate support and leading to exclusion.

"My condition is invisible, and requirements are very specific and unusual. Even with a Nimbus card, many places don't regard me as disabled"

Most disabled respondents have had to prove their eligibility BUT one in four of them find the process fairly or very difficult.

In general, how easy do you find it to prove your eligibility for particular ticket types?

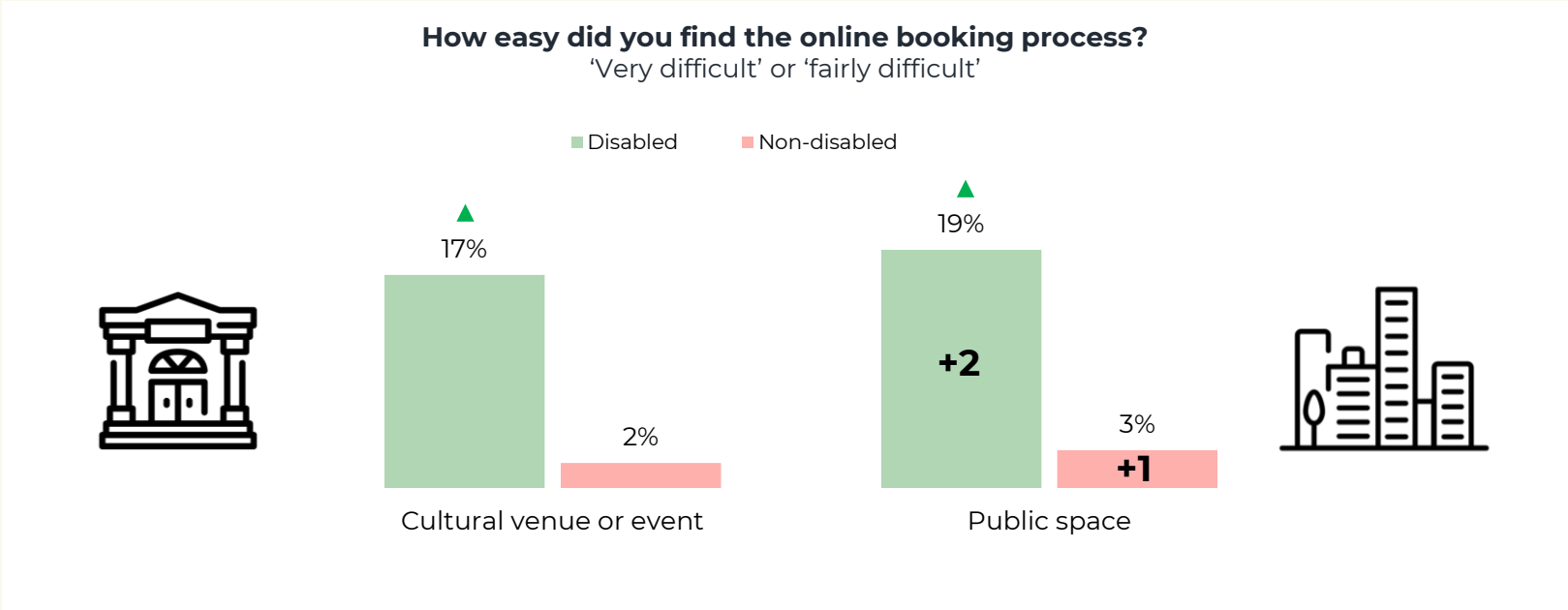


78%
of disabled visitors
have had to prove
eligibility at some point



In contrast, **36%** of non-disabled visitors have provided eligibility proof, with only **1%** finding it difficult

Despite existing barriers, cultural venues or events pose fewer difficulties for online booking than public spaces*.



*N.B. This is an average across ratings for taxis, trains, hotels, restaurants, grocery deliveries, and visitor attractions.

Physical accessibility of cultural venues



What are the most common access challenges at cultural venues?

How can better design and communication help overcome them?

Key findings: Physical accessibility of cultural venues

1

40% of disabled visitors struggle with arena access, with concert venues (36%) and heritage sites (34%) also presenting significant barriers.

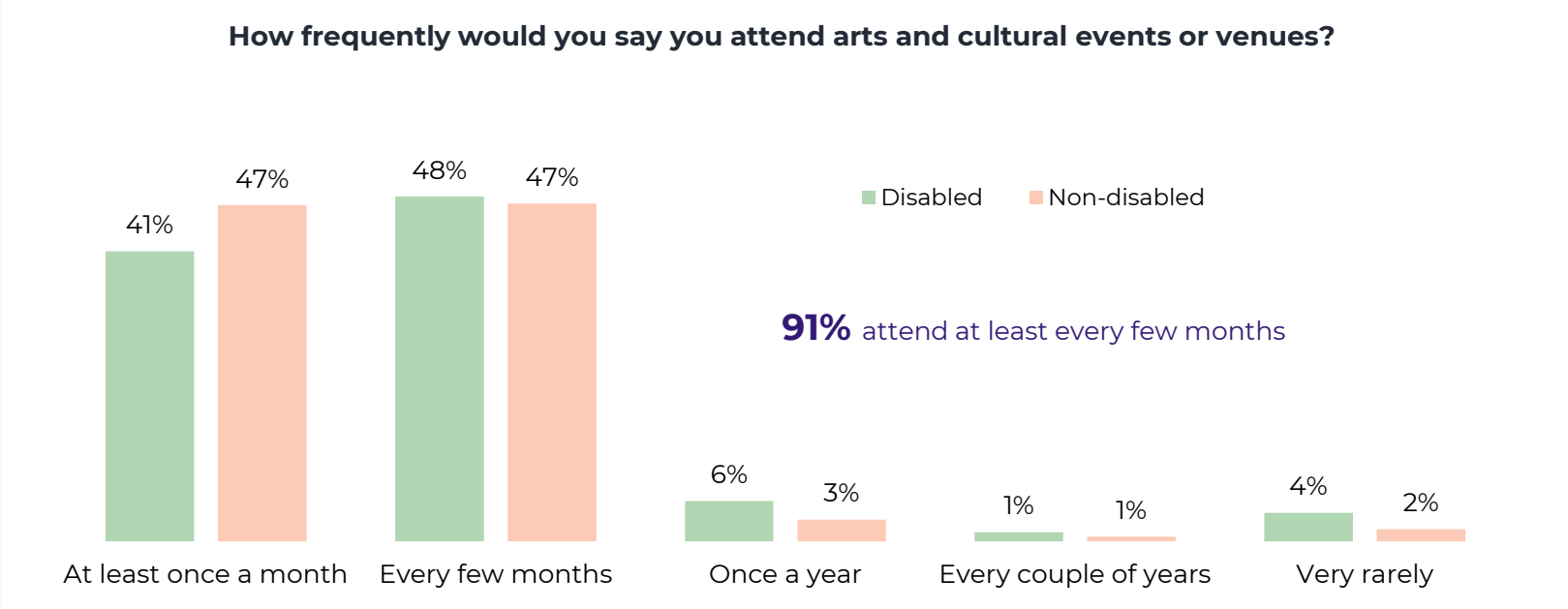
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Physical barriers like seating availability are significant, but **uncertainty, lack of confidence in accessibility, and feeling unwelcome also deter attendance.**

3

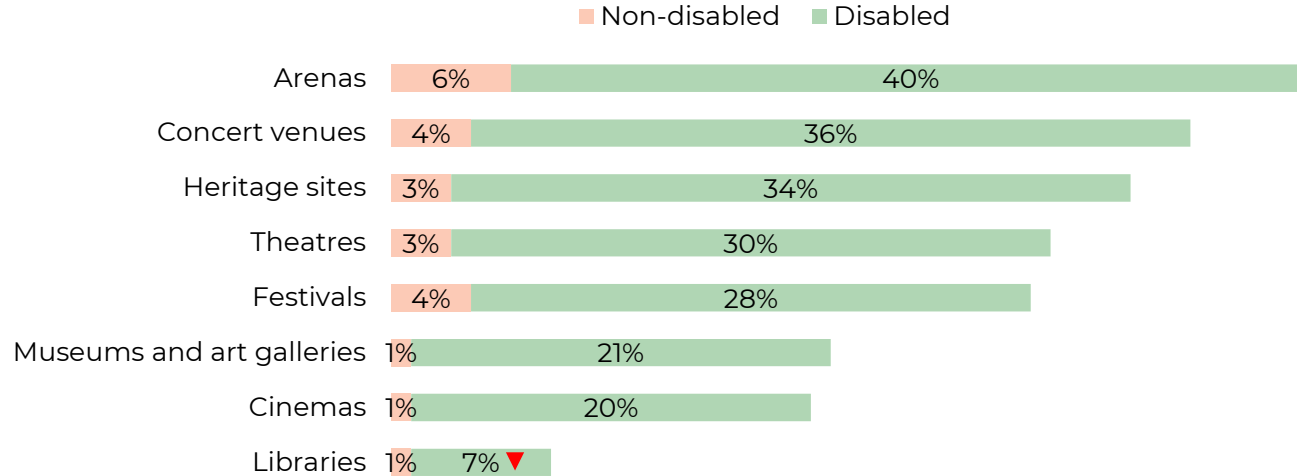
Providing clear information, such as step-free routes, seating options, and accessible facilities, **can significantly reduce barriers to attendance.**

Cultural attendance frequency is high across all groups but **is** slightly lower for disabled visitors.



However, some cultural spaces provide more difficulties, with arenas being the most difficult and libraries the least.

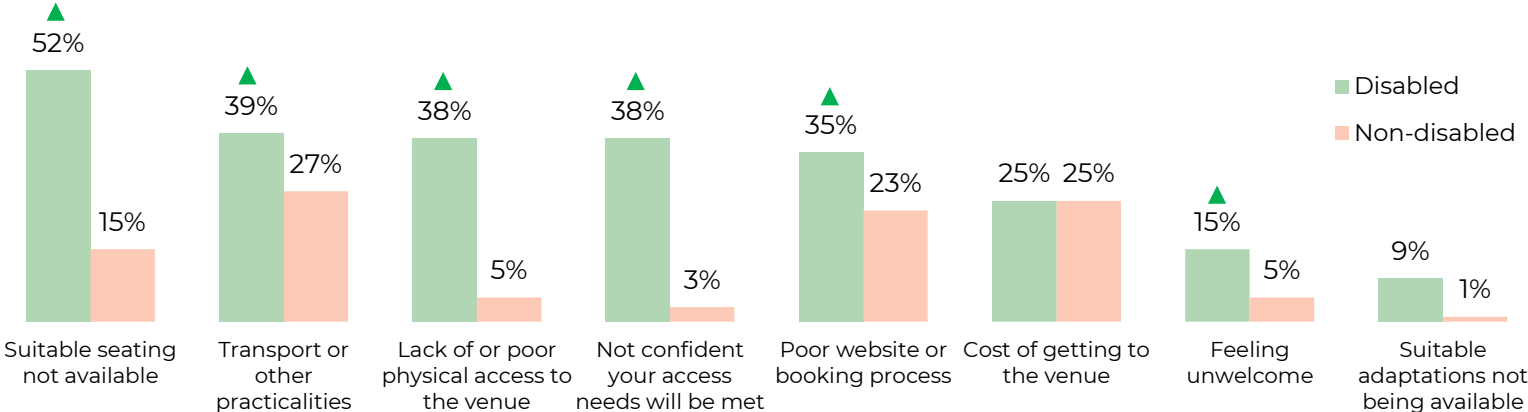
In general, how easy or difficult do you find it to access the following types of cultural venues and places?
'Very difficult' and 'Fairly difficult'



The biggest barriers to attendance are seating availability, transport, physical access, and confidence that access needs will be met.

Have any of the following ever made you unable to attend or take someone to a cultural venue or event?

of the 86% of disabled visitors and 55% of non-disabled visitors who have been unable to attend...



Feeling unwelcome and uncertainty about access needs being met are more common among under 35s than older age groups

But accessibility isn't just about physical space, with social, financial, and sensory factors also key.

Does anything else make it difficult for you to attend cultural venues?



Physical Barriers

Many respondents highlight difficulties navigating venues due to inadequate facilities such as **lifts, ramps, accessible toilets, and designated seating.**

"people standing directly in front of wheelchair space so I couldn't see"



Financial Constraints

High ticket prices, **additional fees for carers**, and travel expenses prevent many from attending cultural venues.

"I cannot afford to go if I have to buy a ticket for my companion as well"



Staff and Public Attitudes

Negative experiences with venue staff and other visitors contribute to a **sense of exclusion and discomfort.**

"Previous experiences where theatre staff showed no understanding of my son's needs"

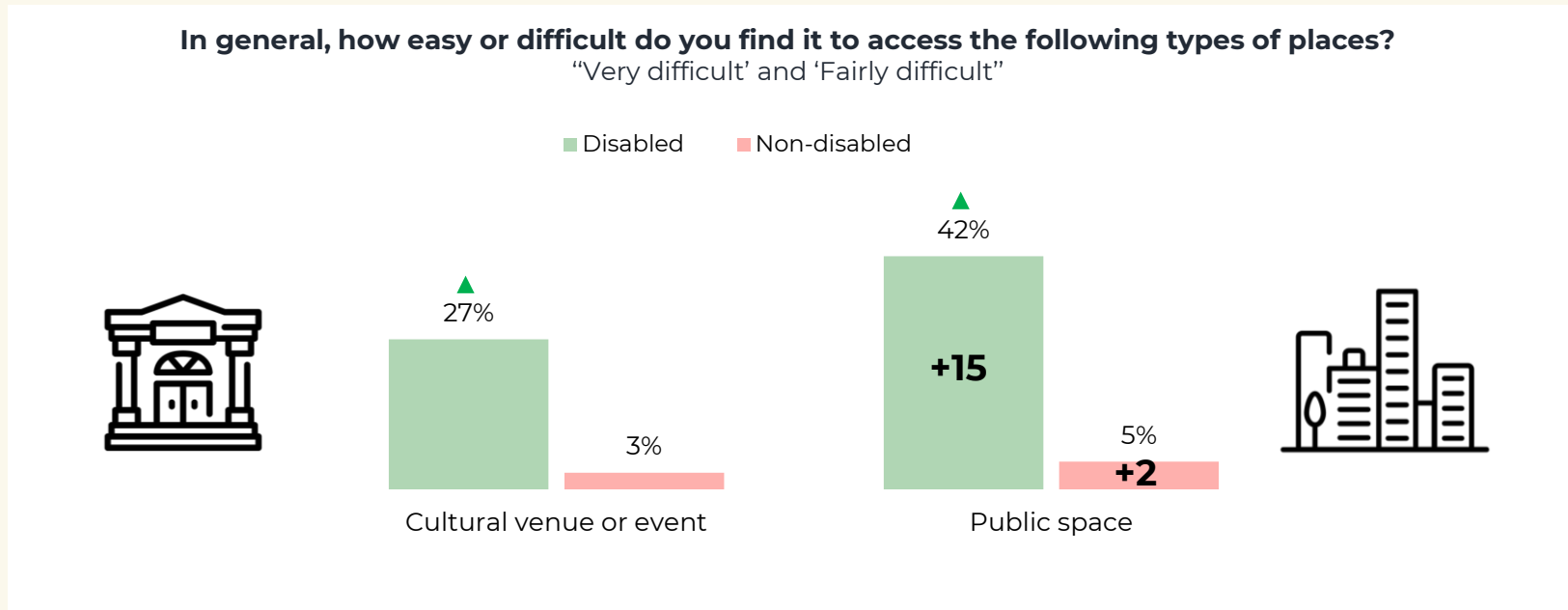


Sensory Overload

Busy, noisy, and crowded environments make attending events challenging, **especially for neurodivergent individuals or those with anxiety.**

"I feel panicked by crowds and not knowing if there will be a quiet space"

However, cultural venues and events present fewer access challenges than public spaces*.



*N.B. This is an average across ratings for taxis, trains, hotels, restaurants, grocery deliveries, and visitor attractions.

Confidence in visiting cultural venues



How does confidence in
accessibility affect
attendance?

What role does clear
communication play in
improving visitor
experience?

Key findings: Confidence in visiting cultural venues

1

Disabled visitors are significantly less confident that their needs will be met at cultural venues (39% not confident vs 3% non-disabled).

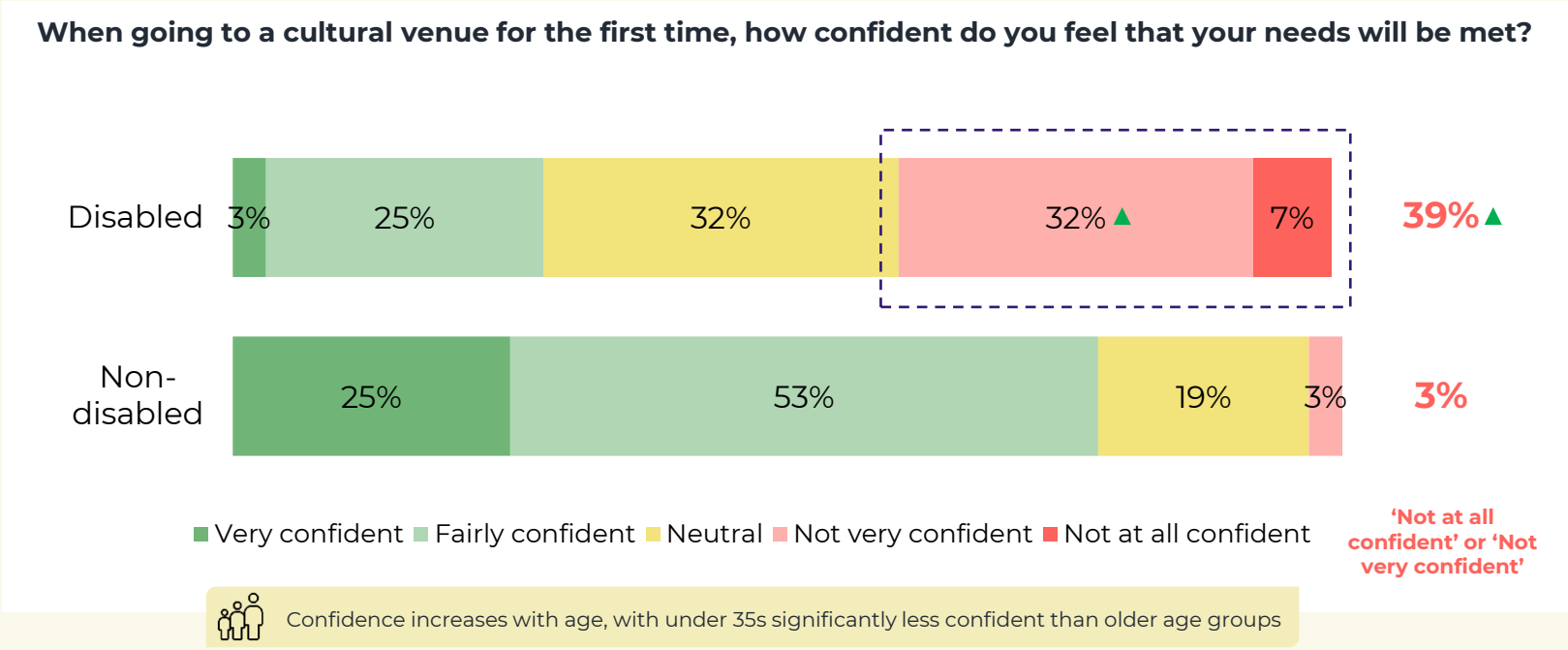
2

Confidence issues impact attendance, with 38% unable to visit a venue due to uncertainty about accessibility.

3

Familiarisation tools help. 55% of disabled visitors use venue photos or videos to prepare for their visit (vs 37% non-disabled).

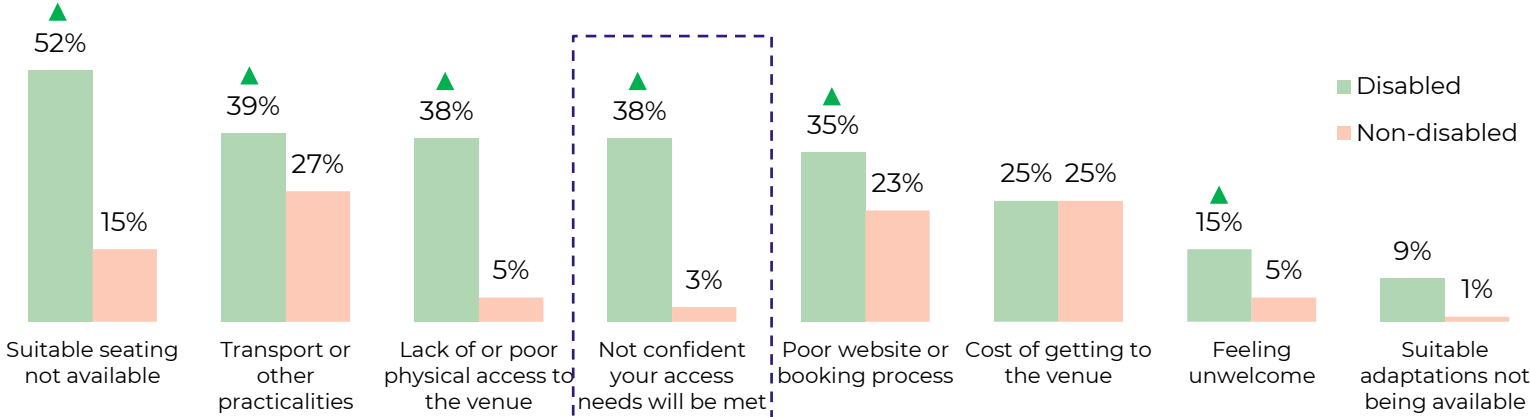
Confidence in accessibility is a key barrier for disabled visitors, who are 36% less confident than non-disabled visitors that their needs will be met.




This lack of confidence has real impact, with 38% of disabled visitors missing cultural events as a result.

Have any of the following ever made you unable to attend or take someone to a cultural venue or event?

of the 86% of disabled visitors and 55% of non-disabled visitors who have been unable to attend...

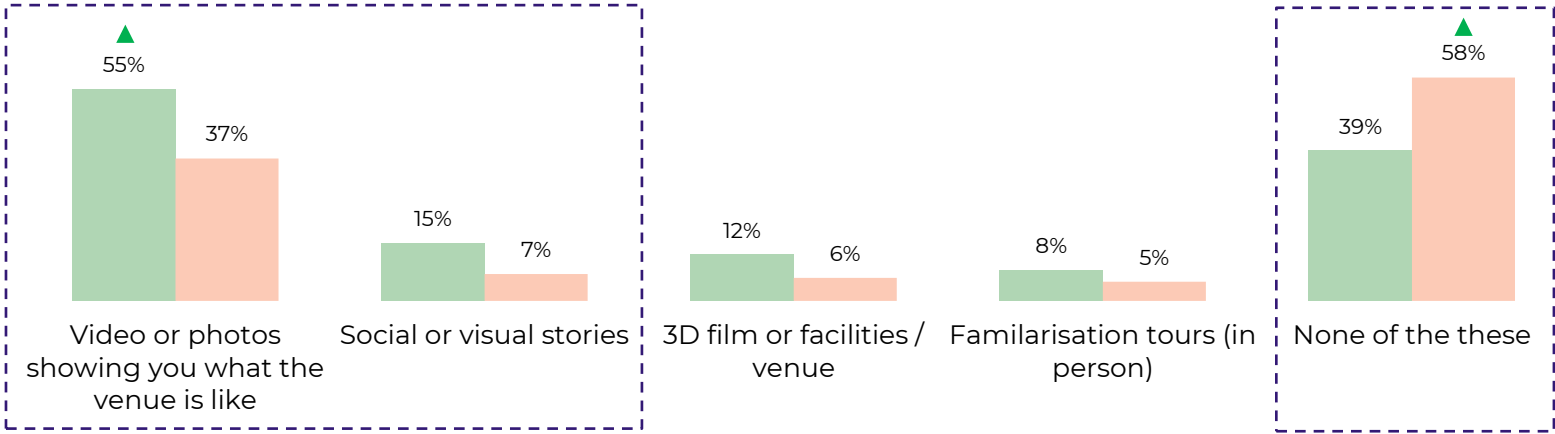


 And this impact is highest among under 35s

Many visitors use visual tools like videos, photos, and social stories, but encouraging their use among those who do not could boost confidence.

Have you, or anyone in your household, chosen to use any of the following when attending a cultural venue or event?

■ Disabled ■ Non-disabled



Younger age groups use all these tools more frequently

Example: National Theatre

The National Theatre's Visual Stories provide clear details about what to expect at both the venue and the production, helping audiences feel informed and prepared before they attend.

About the National Theatre Dorfman Theatre



There are accessible toilets in the ground floor foyer.



There are lots of staff available if you have questions or if you would like directions to your seats. **National Theatre staff wear black t-shirts with white writing.**



The Dorfman Theatre has three levels of audience seating: the **pit** (lower level), the **circle** (middle level), and the **gallery** (highest level).

The Production Content Guidance

A Tupperware of Ashes contains: contains themes of grief, death, cremation, and dementia and Alzheimer's.

Scents of the sea and incense are used in the foyer and auditorium.



Bright flashing / pulsing lights



Smoke and haze



Screaming / shouting and loud noises



Moments of total blackout



References to and sound effects of medical conditions and procedures



References to Abortion



Strong and offensive language



References to racism



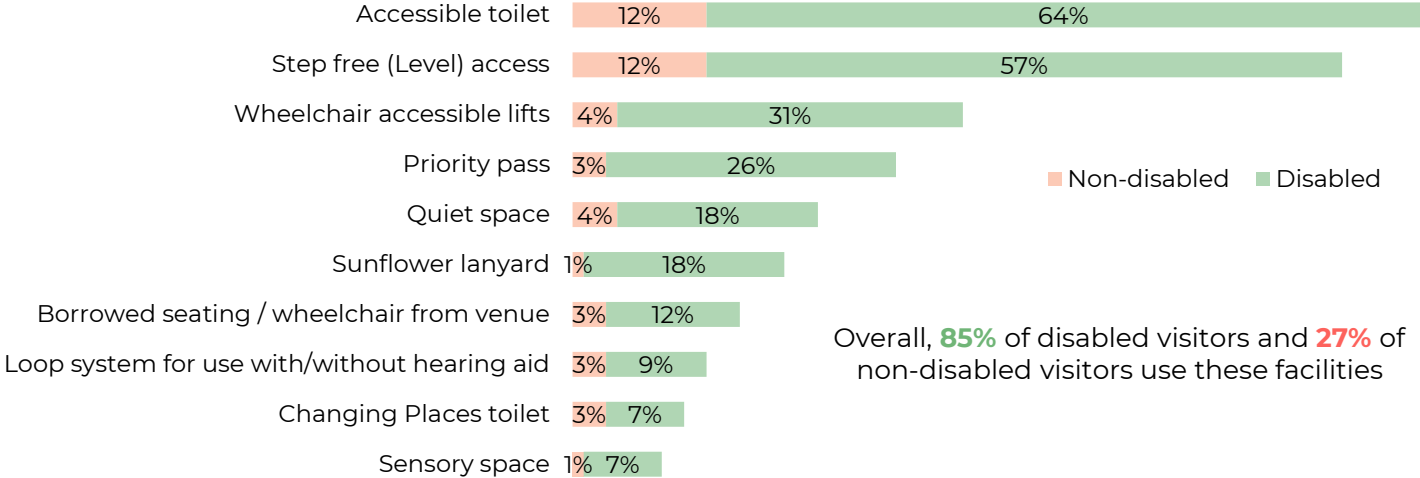
Depictions and threats of violence



References to Covid and lockdowns

Accessible toilets and step-free access are the most used provisions, but priority passes, sunflower lanyards, and quiet spaces are also important.

Have you, or anyone in your household, chosen to use any of the following when attending a cultural venue or event?



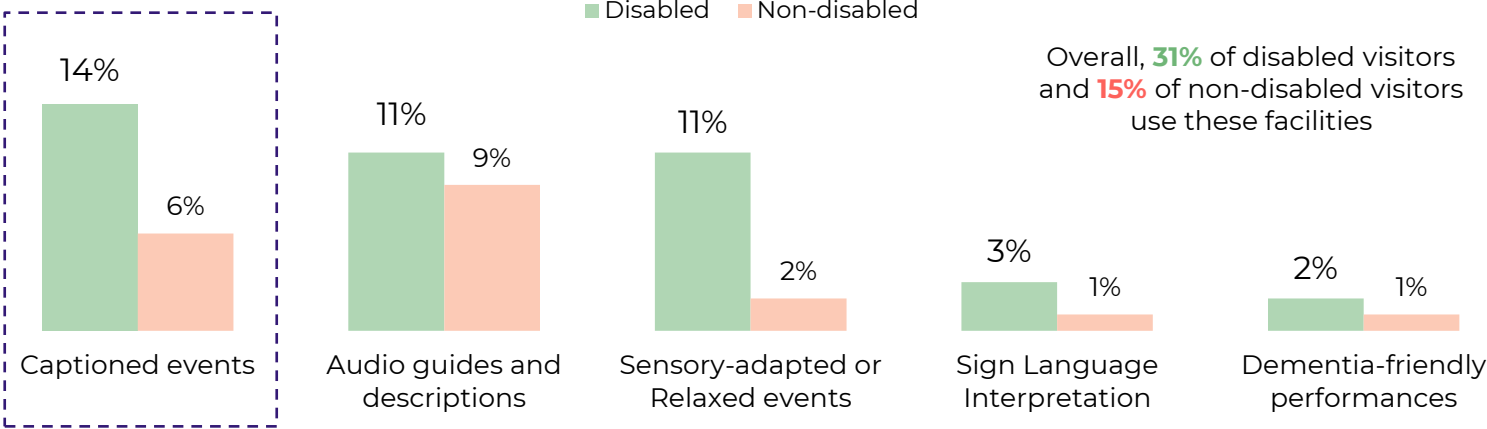
Overall, **85%** of disabled visitors and **27%** of non-disabled visitors use these facilities



Quiet and sensory spaces are used notably more by under 35s than other age groups

Captioned events and sensory-adapted or relaxed events are widely used, with both significantly more accessed by under 35s.

Have you, or anyone in your household, chosen to use any of the following when attending a cultural venue or event?



And sensory-adapted or relaxed events and captioned events are used significantly more by under 35s

Technology in cultural venues



How accessible and user-friendly is technology in cultural venues for visitors?

Key findings: Technology in cultural venues

1

Tech use is common, with 41% of disabled visitors scan QR codes for venue information, and 33% order refreshments via mobile

2

Digital access isn't universal, as 24% of disabled visitors struggle with venue technology, compared to 17% of non-disabled visitors.

3

Mixed experiences exist, with 51% of disabled visitors find technology easy to use, yet they are also more likely to face difficulties.

Technology is widely used in cultural venues, with QR codes, mobile ordering, and digital programs especially accessed among disabled visitors.

Have you done any of the following in a cultural venue?
Disabled / Non-disabled respondents



41%
54% ▲

Scanned a QR code to access information



28%
33%

Used a mobile device to read a programme online or as a download



33% ▲
22%

Used a mobile device to order refreshments



18%
16%

Used a self-service machine to order refreshments

Disabled visitors are more likely to use mobile and self-service ordering, often to avoid the challenges of counter service.

Have you done any of the following in a cultural venue?

Disabled / Non-disabled respondents

More disabled visitors use technology to order refreshments, whether via mobile or self-service kiosks.

A previous Indigo Share Hot Topic, the '[self service venue](#)' showed that many disabled visitors, especially neurodivergent individuals, feel **counter service is overwhelming and time-pressured**, while others struggle with the **physical challenge of reaching the bar and returning to their seats**.



33% ▲

22%

Used a mobile device to order refreshments



18%

16%

Used a self-service machine to order refreshments

Self-service technology empowers visitors by offering convenience, independence, and a more comfortable experience.

What do you like about self-service technology in cultural venues?



Convenience and speed

Self-service technology saves time by reducing queues and **allowing people to access services at their own pace**. It makes ordering, ticketing, and retrieving information more efficient.

“It saves queuing and allows you to access services in your own time”



Independence and control

It gives people autonomy, **allowing them to complete tasks without relying on others**. This is especially useful for those with mobility, sensory, or communication challenges.

“I don't have to speak to anyone... my anxiety often makes me want to be hyper independent and go as unnoticed as possible”



Reduced social interaction

For those who prefer minimal interaction, **self-service removes the pressure of speaking to staff or navigating crowds**, making the experience more comfortable.

“I struggle to speak to people sometimes so this is a nicer way of being able to look at the full extent of the menu without pressure of creating a queue”

...but its success depends on good design, clear support, and accessibility to ensure it works for everyone.

What do you dislike about self-service technology in cultural venues?



Technical issues and accessibility

Glitches, unclear instructions, and poorly designed interfaces can make it difficult to use, especially for those with disabilities.

"I struggle using technology due to my sight"



Lack of support

If something goes wrong, **there's often no one immediately available to help**, making the experience stressful and frustrating.

"No-one to speak to if they go wrong and they do regularly"

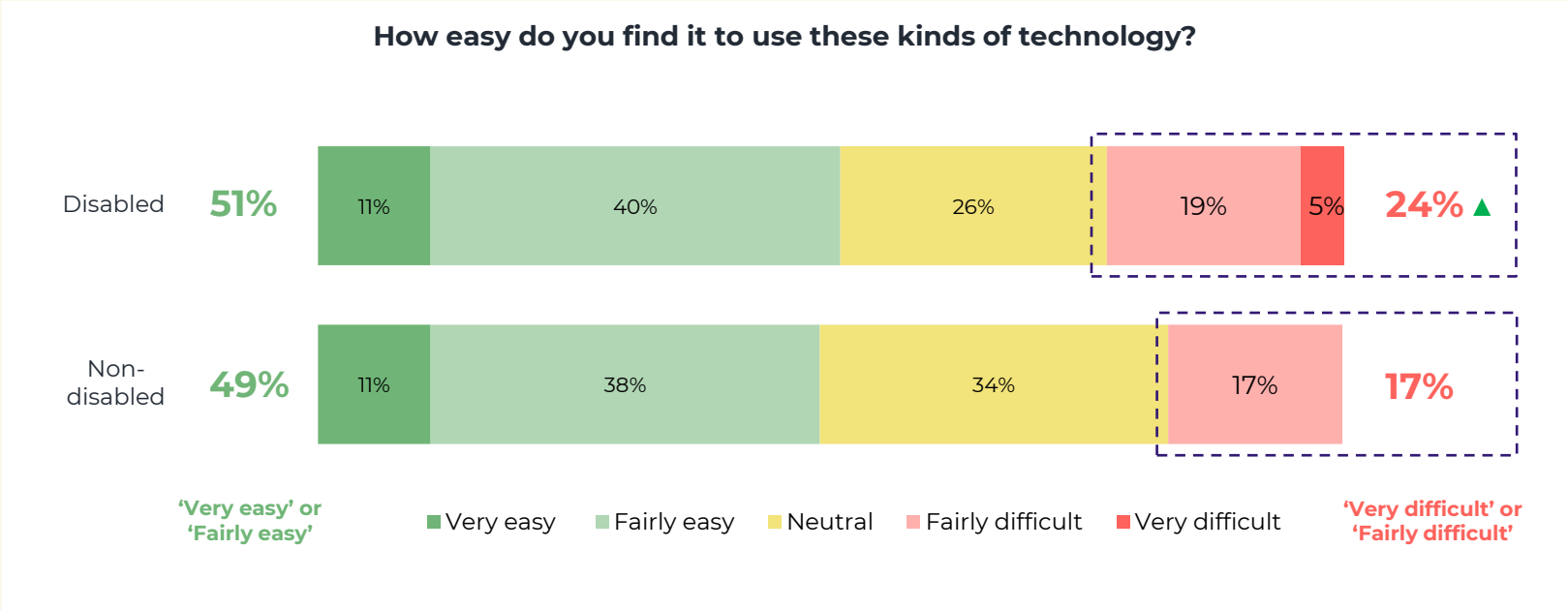


Complexity and inconvenience

Some find it **confusing, time-consuming, or physically inaccessible**, especially when apps must be downloaded, or machines are hard to reach.

"It's annoying if the solution to self service is a venue / organisation specific app. Having to download yet another app and create yet another user account"

Most disabled visitors find technology easy to use, but they are also more likely to face challenges than non-disabled visitors.



Access Culture: Conclusions

Accessibility benefits everyone

Access interventions support more people than expected. While 56% of audiences identify as disabled, many non-disabled visitors also have access requirements. Over a quarter have used physical access aids, and 15% have used adapted performance features. Simple additions, like captions, could benefit a wide range of visitors.



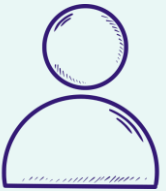
Access Culture: Conclusions

Clearer information is key

The biggest challenge is access to information - something we can actively improve.

With 75% of disabled visitors always researching before attending, but many struggling to find key details, venues must provide clearer, more accessible content.

Websites should include easy-to-find transport, navigation, and access details, with photos, videos, and even online chat to enhance usability.



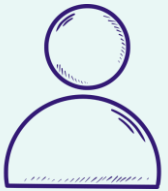
Access Culture: Conclusions

Technology can be an enabler

When designed well, technology enhances accessibility, from mobile ordering to self-service kiosks.

However, many still find it difficult to use. Consistency across venues is crucial to improving confidence. One bad experience at a single venue can deter visitors from others.

Industry-wide collaboration and standards, such as the All In programme, can build trust and improve accessibility for all.



About Indigo

We are award-winning audience specialists.

We work individually with arts and cultural organisations to bring the audience's voice into decision-making, as well as running sector-wide research projects on particular issues and topics.

Our ground-breaking sector-wide research during the Covid-19 crisis included *After the Interval*, the *Culture Restart Toolkit* and *Missing Audiences*. It was used by over 500 cultural organisations and gathered over 500,000 responses, and won us multiple national awards, including a national 'Outstanding Leadership' award for Katy Raines, Indigo's CEO.

You can see all our previous reports, plus the latest articles and insights on our [blog](#).

If anyone requires this document in an alternative format please contact us at info@indigo-ltd.com



[Indigo Share](#) offers the cultural sector a collective approach to audience insight:



[Subscription](#) – a flexible annual programme featuring post-visit surveys and an annual survey.



[Hot Topics](#) – FREE ad hoc surveys responding to particular topics and sector challenges.

If you are interested in finding out more about Indigo Share or would like to speak about a potential project, please email us: info@indigo-ltd.com

Or book in a call with one of the team:

Katy Raines, CEO | [Book a 30 minute call](#)

Kerry Radden, Associate Director | [Book a 30 minute call](#)



About our research sponsor: **pointOne**

Creating inclusive experiences is essential for cultural organisations to make sure everyone feels welcome. And venues must take a proactive approach, as accessibility plays a key role in shaping audience and visitor experiences.

pointOne is proud to sponsor Access Culture, a vital resource for understanding accessibility perceptions and identifying how technology can enhance the visitor experience.

With over a decade of experience working with theatres and venues, we deliver unique and tailored technology features and solutions, including interval ordering, self-service kiosks, and ticketing integrations. We're proud to be experts in the sector and trusted by leading UK Arts organisations.

We hope this research provides valuable insights and practical steps to help venues improve accessibility.

If you'd like to explore how technology can support your organisation, get in touch today.

Alex Morgan, Head of Sales & Partnerships
alex.morgan@pointone.co.uk

About **All In**

All In is the new access scheme designed to improve accessibility in creativity and culture for deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people in the UK and Ireland.

Developed by disabled people for disabled people, we want to help creative and cultural organisations improve access, remove barriers, and welcome more people with access requirements through their doors.

At All In, we believe everyone should be able to enjoy the diverse range of creative and culture experiences the UK and Ireland has to offer. We are a partnership between Arts Council England, Arts Council Ireland, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Arts Council of Wales, and Creative Scotland.

We're All In, and everyone's welcome.

All In will roll out across the UK later in 2025

Be the first to get the latest news, updates, and developments from All In.

Express your interest at allin.online

