

# LOCKDOWN BREAK

*Public perception of the  
ongoing lockdown and  
its modalities in Lebanon*



# THE BACKGROUND: A BITTER PILL

*With positive cases spinning out of control following a relatively festive and relaxed holiday season, the Lebanese government announced on January 14 an eleven-day lockdown with round the clock curfew, upon recommendation from the COVID-19 committee. The full lockdown was later extended until February 8.*

- During the holiday season, the government eased restrictions over COVID-19 in order to boost the economy and the tourism sector, thus prioritizing economy over public health. This led to a drastic surge in cases with the new year, which put additional strain on an health sector that was already running out of resources, in terms of bed availability, medicine, and equipment.
- With hospitals reaching their maximum capacity for coronavirus patients, Lebanese authorities enforced an initial 11-day nationwide full lockdown, the strictest since the start of the pandemic, starting on January 14 and until February 8, as the decision was extended for 2 additional weeks. With fewer – yet still many – exceptions, citizens were this time notably barred from grocery shopping.
- However, up until the eve of the enforcement phase, details of the lockdown policy remained vague, especially in regard to the curfew movement monitoring.

المجلس الوطني  
رئاسة مجلس الوزراء

رقم الصادر: ٢٦ م من  
بيروت، في: ١١/٢٠٢١

الإغلاق الكامل اعتباراً من صباح يوم الخميس الموافق فيه ٢٠٢١/١/١٤  
ونهاية صباح يوم الإثنين الموافق فيه ٢٠٢١/١/٢٥

بداً على المرسوم الاشتراعي رقم ١٩٨٣/١٠٢ (الدفاع الوطني) لاسيما المادة الثانية منه،  
استناداً للمرسوم رقم ٧٣١٥ تاريخ ٢٠٢٠/١٢/٣١ المتعلق بتمديد إعلان التعبئة العامة  
لمواجهة انتشار فيروس كورونا لغاية ٢٠٢١/٣/٣١ ضمناً،  
وبناءً على توصية اللجنة الوزارية المكلفة متابعة موضوع التدابير والإجراءات الوقائية لفيروس  
كورونا في اجتماعها تاريخ ٢٠٢١/١/١١، والذي عرض خلاله السيد وزير الصحة العامة البيانات  
المرتبطة بانتشار الوباء،  
وبعد استعراض واقع انتشار الفيروس وضرورة رفع جهوزية القطاع الصحي لاسيما الخاص منه  
لمواكبة ارتفاع عدد الاصابات المتزايد بما فيها رفع عدد الاسرة في غرف العناية الفائقة بما لا يقل عن  
١٠٠/ سرير في المستشفيات الخاصة، اضافة الى استكمال التجهيزات الجارية في المستشفيات  
الحكومية.  
وبناءً على ضرورات المصلحة العامة ومقتضيات السلامة،  
فإن السيد رئيس الجمهورية والسيد رئيس مجلس الوزراء أعطيا موافقة استثنائية على القرار  
التالي نصه:  
اولاً: الزام الوافدين من المدن التالية: بغداد، اسطنبول، اصفاء، القاهرة واديس ابابا والتي تُشكل  
٨٥% من عدد حالات الاصابات من الوافدين من اصل حوالي ٥٠٠ حالة وافدة شهرياً،  
بالاقامة على نفقتهم ٧ أيام في احد الفنادق والخضوع لفحص PCR في اليوم الاول عند  
وصولهم وفحص ثانٍ في اليوم السادس من وصولهم  
في مطار رفيق الحريري الدولي اعتباراً من تاريخه لـ  
القادمين في شهر كانون الثاني من العام ٢٠٢٠ ع  
(PCR) في المطار وفحص آخر بعد اسبوع من وص  
فترة حجر الزامي في أحد الفنادق لمدة اقصاها ٧٢  
ويتابعون الحجر بعدها في مكان اقامتهم اذا كانت نت  
تُنصح تعليمات وزارة الصحة العامة بهذا الخصوص،  
وعائلاتهم والزميرون والوفود الرسمية وضباط وعناصر  
الاشخاص الذين تلقوا اللقاح الخاص بكورونا بموجب  
للفحص الفوري (PCR) في المطار على سبيل الاحتياط  
- منع حركة المسافرين القادمين عبر المعابر الحد  
ترافيزيت ودون ان يشمل ذلك عمليات الشحن.  
- التأكيد على القادمين الى لبنان وجوب تعبئة الإ  
التطبيق الإلكتروني (# معا ضد الكورونا App  
العممة، على أن تتولى شركات الطيران التأكد من  
(PCR) سلبية، وتعبئته لهدد الإستمارة قبل السع  
لبنان.  
- تُحدد دقائق تطبيق هذا الاجراء عند الاقتضاء، ك  
مولفة من وزراء الداخلية والبلديات والصحة العامة و  
ثانياً: الطلب الى الوزراء المعنيين تشديد الاجراءات الت  
المُعنة في سبيل إلزام المستشفيات الخاصة استخد  
مرضى كورونا تحت طائلة الملاحقة القانونية والإدارية والقضائية، لاسيما الطلب من

## THE LOCKDOWN: A DIGITAL RESPONSE

*Right before the decision came into effect, the IMPACT platform provided a digital solution that allowed for a better monitoring of the mobility requests. On one hand, citizens could request limited mobility during curfew hours, and on the other, authorities were able to monitor and control lockdown enforcement.*

- Up until lockdown eve, the Lebanese government was considering tracking citizens by requesting their purchase receipts on their way back from their errands. However, this rudimentary monitoring technique would have inevitably lead to the failure of the lockdown.
- In this context, the Inter Municipal/Ministerial Platform for Analysis Coordination and Tracking (IMPACT) offered a digital solution that enhances the measures recommended by the national COVID-19 committee.
- A double digital procedure was set up to include both citizens who were included in the lockdown decision, and those who were exempted from it. Both categories were requested to fill a short form, respectively to request permission to go out, or to register their mobility under the exemptions.
- Applications for mobility permits could also be made by SMS, or by calling a hotline operated by the government's Disaster Risk Management (DRM) unit, which helped reduce the digital gap.
- Requests are treated through an automated response, similarly to mobility permit systems implemented worldwide, such as in France or United Arab Emirates.
- Internal Security Forces (ISF) were entrusted with the tracking and monitoring missions on the ground, to ensure compliance with the lockdown and the subsequent permit procedure.

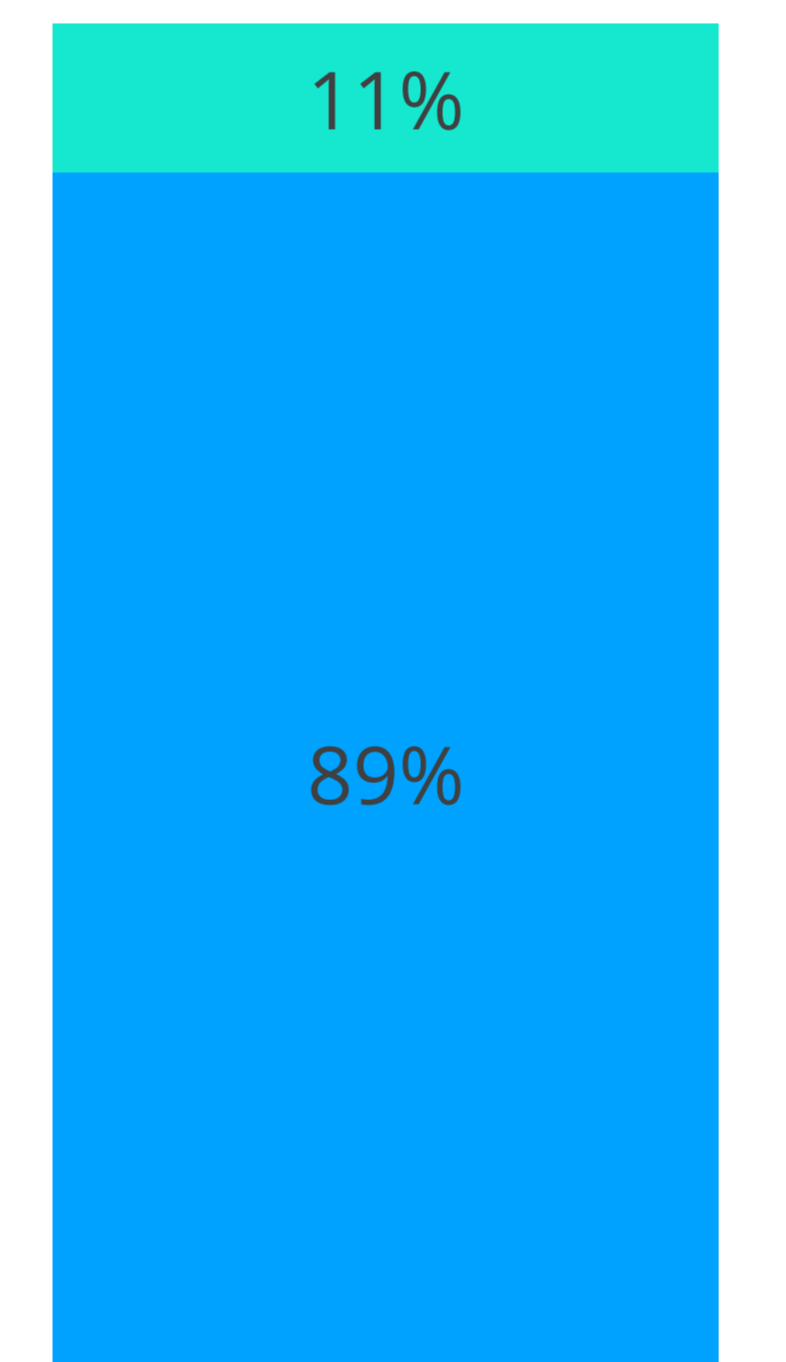
The screenshot shows the IMPACT mobile application interface. At the top, there is a dark blue header with white text in Arabic and English: "طلب إذن خاص للتنقل خلال فترة الإغلاق الكامل" and "Personal request to go outside during lockdown". To the right is the logo of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of the Interior. Below the header is the IMPACT logo and the text "اختر نموذج الاستمارة المناسب" and "Please choose one of the following forms". There are two white buttons with blue text and arrows. The left button is labeled "استمارة للأشخاص الخاضعين لقرار الإغلاق الكامل" and "Form for individuals subject to lockdown decision". The right button is labeled "استمارة للمستثنين من قرار الإغلاق الكامل" and "Form for individuals excluded from lockdown decision".

# THE METHODOLOGY: QUAL-QUANT

*This brief is a rapid assessment of the public's experience so far when it comes to the total lockdown restrictions, the use of the mobility request platform, and the interaction with the security forces while on the move. It is based on qualitative evidence and on a phone survey with a sample of platform users. It concludes with recommendations to key stakeholders.*

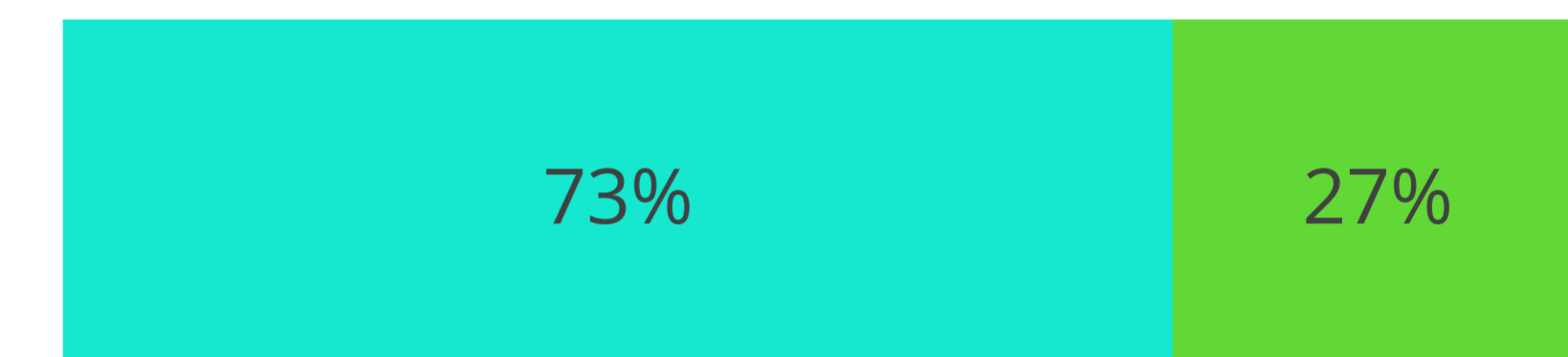
- A phone survey was conducted with a random sample of **390** citizens among those requesting mobility permits on IMPACT between Saturday, **January 16** and Friday, **January 22**.
- The sample is equally distributed between citizens residing inside Beirut (**51.5%**) and those outside the capital (**48.5%**).
- The survey was conducted by an independent call center, through an anonymous questionnaire including **32** questions covering citizens' reaction to the lockdown decision and their ability to cope with it, their use of the platform, and their perception of ISF's presence on the ground.
- Note that the survey was conducted with individuals already engaged with the mobility request platform. Results are therefore aimed at answering questions in relation to its use, not a conclusive assessment of broader community-wide compliance with government policy. However, findings are still useful in informing decision-making going forward.
- In parallel, media monitoring of online news also provided qualitative evidence for this analysis.

Would you mind answering a few questions on your experience so far?



■ I'd rather not  
■ Not at all, go ahead

Gender breakdown



■ Gender ■ Male ■ Female

Age bracket

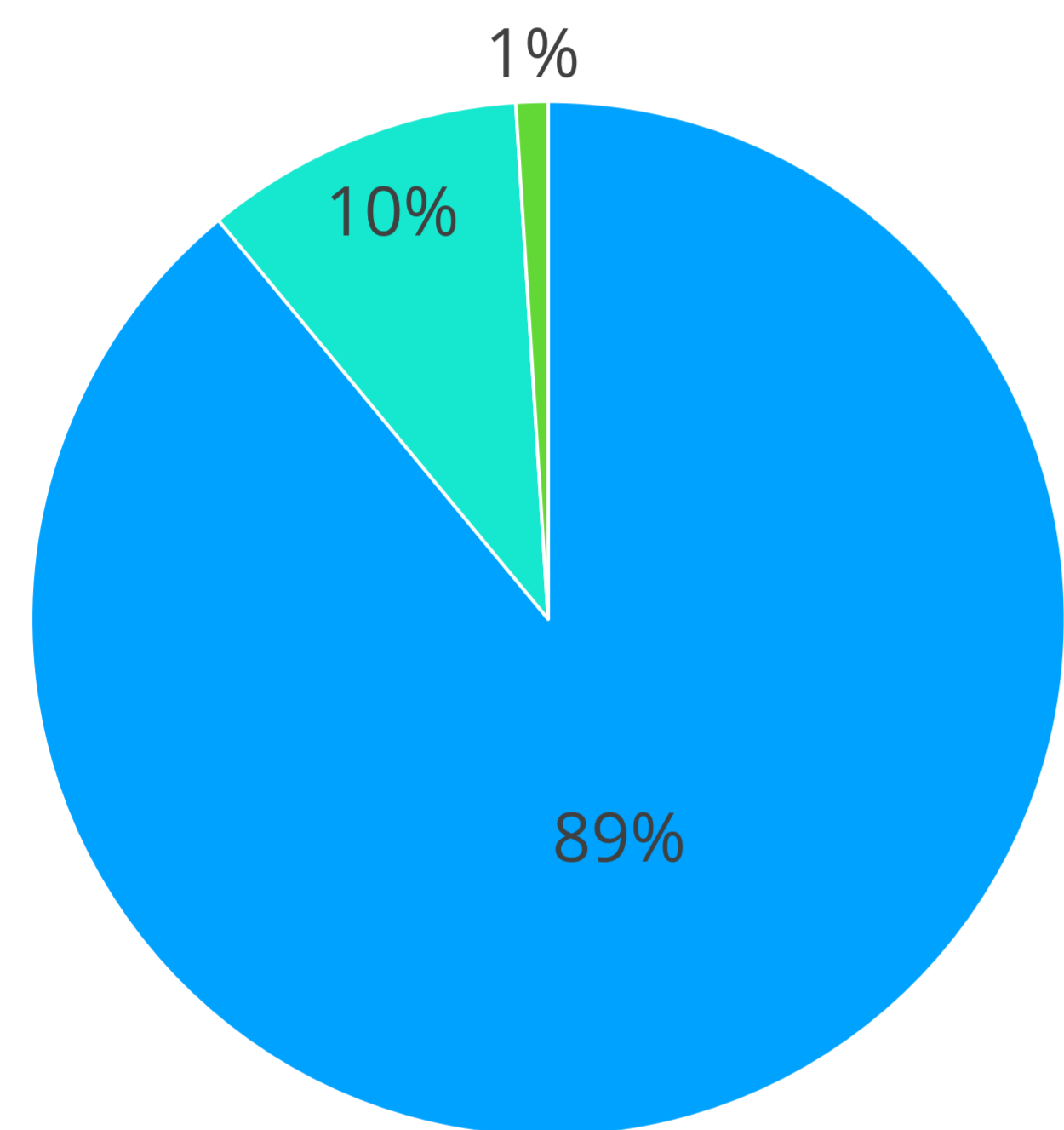


■ < 18 ■ 18-29 ■ 30-49 ■ 50-74 ■ > 75

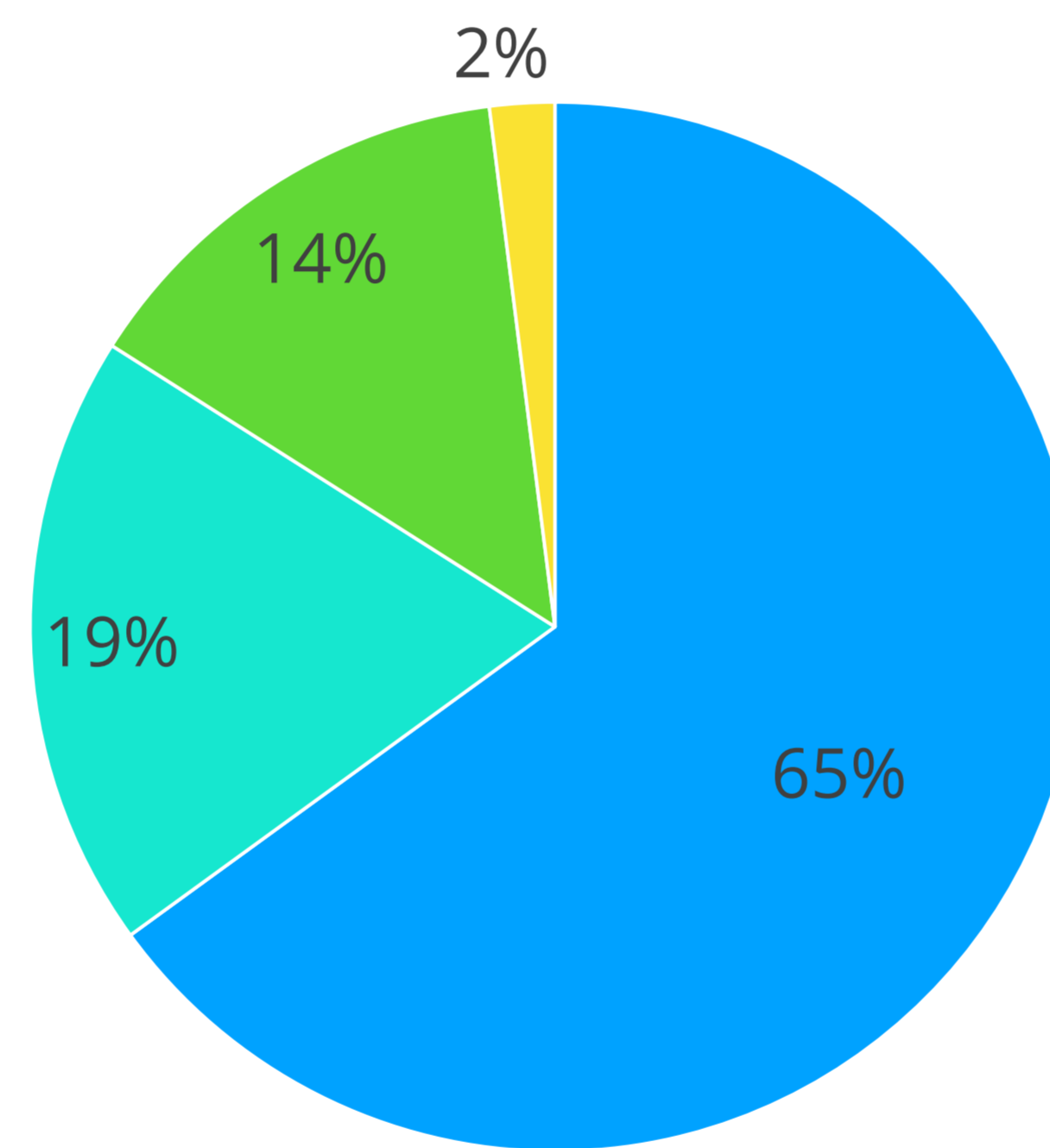
# THE REACTION: COMPLIANCE, COMMITMENT, FATIGUE

Citizens have so far shown a high level of compliance with lockdown instructions, in Beirut and the rest of the country. However, while the majority declares being able to handle a potential extension of the lockdown period, financial and psychological suffering are clearly starting to take a toll on their will.

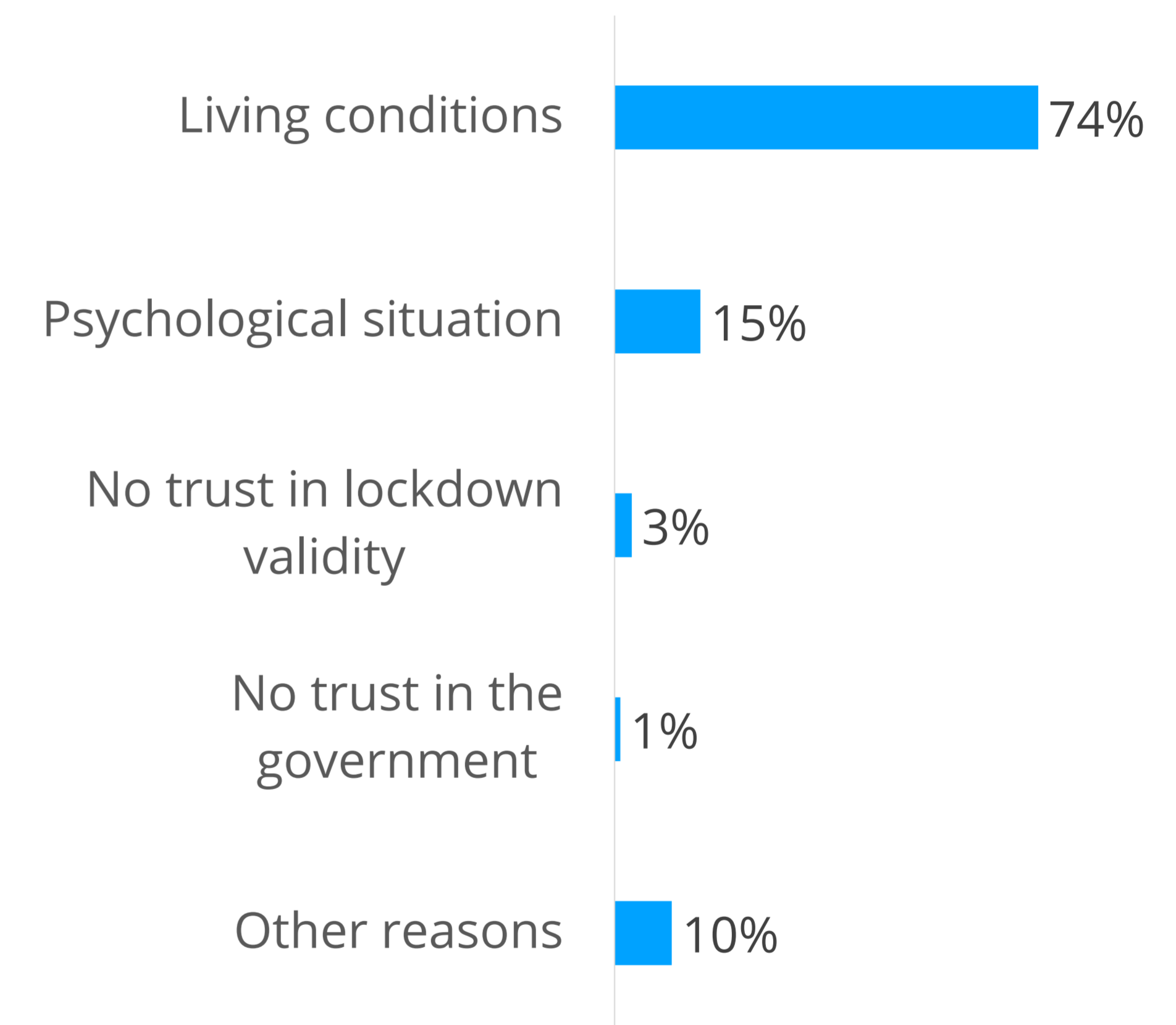
To what extent have you been able to abide by the total lockdown decision?



Would you be able to cope with an extension of the total lockdown period?



If not, why?



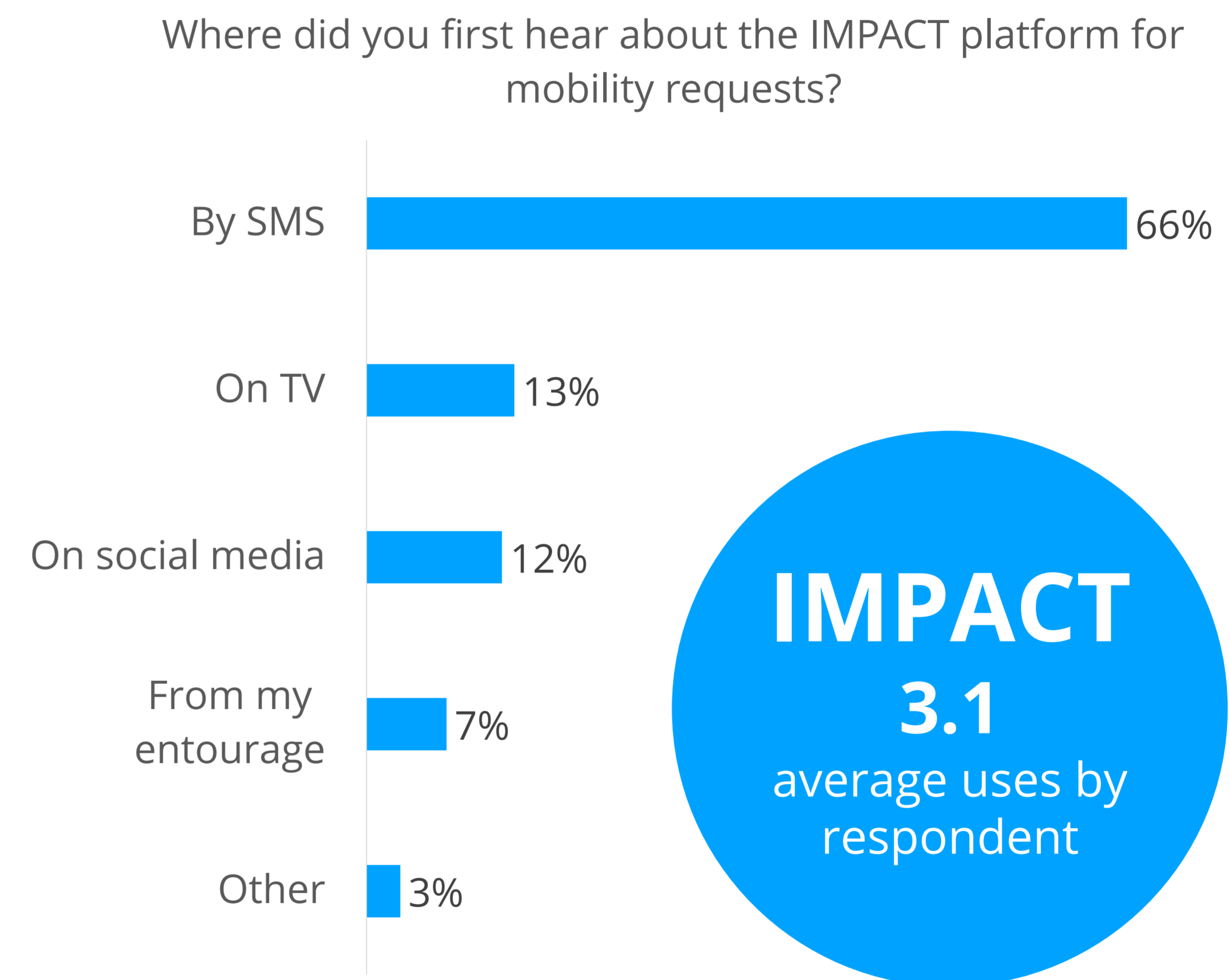
■ Always ■ To a certain extent ■ Never ■ Yes ■ To a certain extent ■ No ■ I don't know

- **89%** of respondents claimed to have fully committed to the lockdown instructions, with **80%** also reporting commitment in their entourage.
- **65%** of respondents believe that they could handle a lockdown extension by authorities (*this extension was announced since*). The remaining **35%** are mainly worried about challenging living conditions (**74%**) and psychological suffering (**15%**).

## THE PROCESS: DIGITAL TO THE RESCUE

*The announcement of the platform on the eve of the lockdown swept the nation, trending on social media with a touch of distinctive Lebanese humor, mostly poking fun at the automated request validation. As of the first morning, the platform went live with a massive numbers of permit requests, and perception gradually started to shift.*

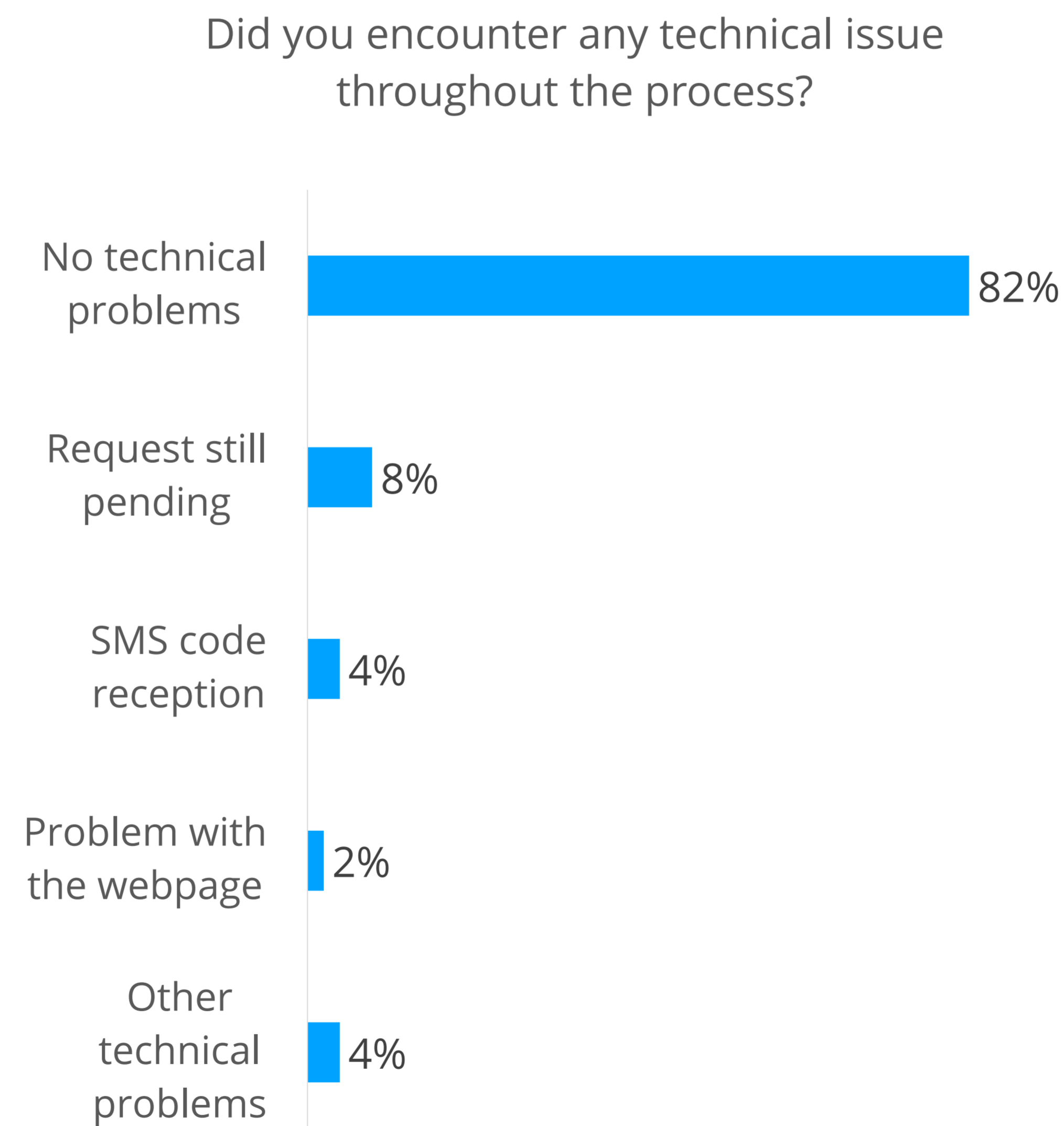
- **66%** of respondent first heard about the platform through the SMS broadcasts, while **13%** of them saw the announcement on TV and **12%** through social media.
- On average, the platform was used **3.1** times by respondent. Some respondents requested permits several times a day regardless of their requests' final status, keeping in mind that non-exempted citizens were allowed **1** travel permit per day.
- To date, more than **1.3M** requests were submitted, mainly through the platform (**88%**, with **12%** submitted via SMS).
- The public's first reaction was sarcasm. Social media users displayed their entrenched lack of trust in government by cracking jokes. They tried to test the platform identifying some of its initial flaws. Some posts went viral, generating even more sarcasm.
- Nevertheless, and within a few hours, users began realizing that the people behind the platform were often proactive in explaining the process and admitting that features are being constantly improved. This led to a notable shift in the public perception, later that same day.



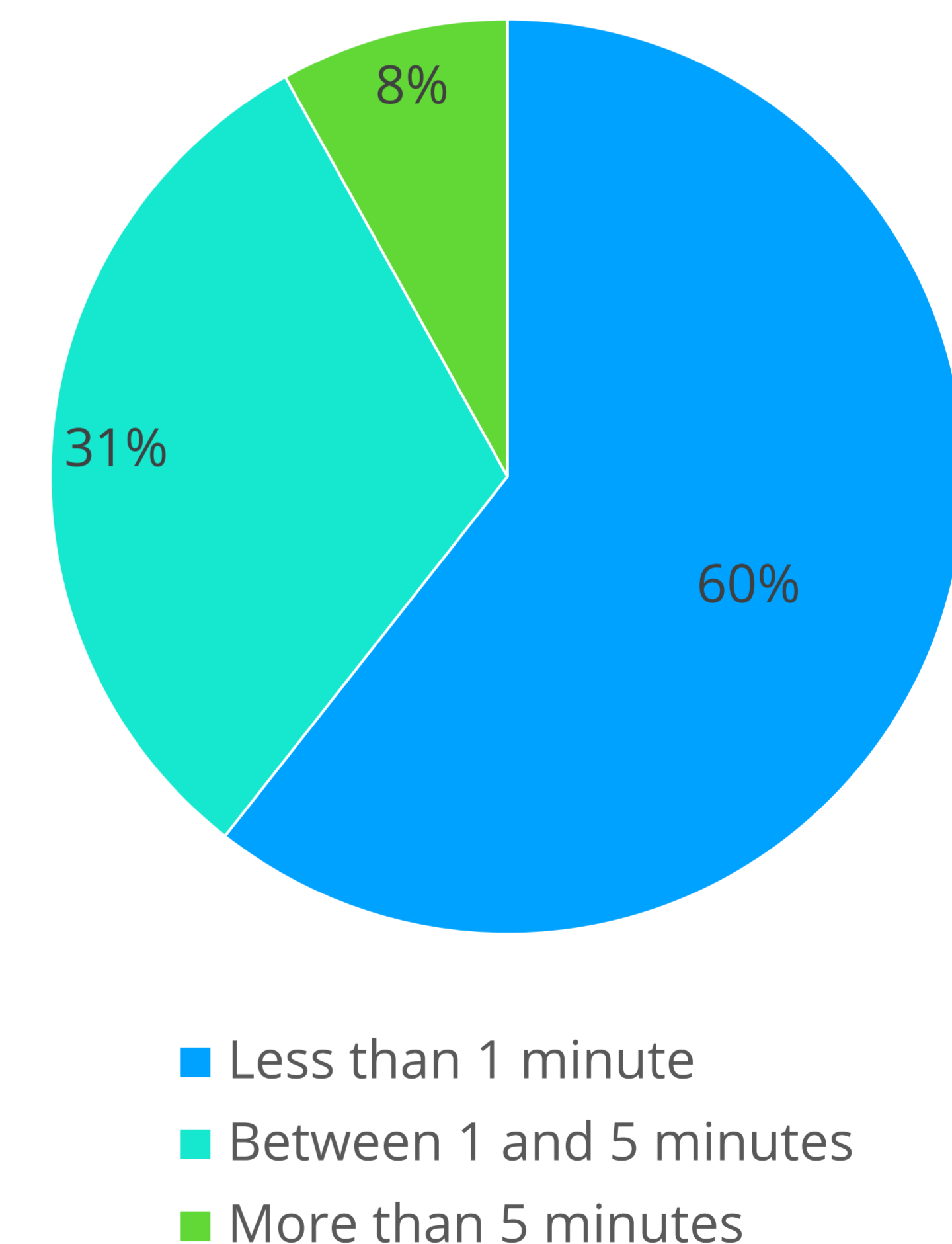
## THE PLATFORM: TECHNICAL PERFORMANCE

*In fact, despite the considerable traffic and the initial glitches, the platform has been performing well overall. The few technical issues raised were immediately tackled, which explains both the respondents' positive perception of the experience and the short average time spent on the digital procedure.*

- A majority of respondents did not face any technical problems while using the platform (**82%**), with only **8%** reporting pending requests (not receiving an answer).
- Other minor issues reported by respondents were problems with reception of the SMS code (**4%**), and some problems with webpage loading (**2%**).
- Most of the respondents waited less than **1** minute between the submission of their request and the actual response. Still, a few respondents reported noticeably longer wait times (**8%**).



What was the average wait time between request and response?



## THE COMMUNICATION: A TWO-WAY STREET

The official IMPACT Twitter account has been proactively responding to users' requests and needs. A clear chain of communication was established for the first time between citizens and the operation room at the DRM unit, drawing mostly positive feedback and providing a good example of trust building.

وبعد ساعات من الانتظار،  
تطلعي عم بتخالفني شروط الإقفال الكامل!

ولكن مشكور فريق [@impact\\_gov](#) كانوا عم يتواصلوا معي.

يعطيكم العافية على جهودكم. هل المنصة متاحة للقطاع الخاص للتطوع والمساعد  
في تحويل عدد أكبر من مؤسسات الدولة على سبيل المثل لا الحصر، تنظيم عمل  
الضمان الاجتماعي؟

تم رفض طلبكم لمخالفة شروط الإقفال  
الكامل.الرجاء الإلتزام بإجراءات الإقفال  
الكامل والتقيد بالتدابير الوقائية.

طرح فريق "سمكس" على المسؤولين عن منصة "إمباكت" وموقع  
[covid.pcm.gov.lb](#) عدة أسئلة تتعلق باحترام المنصة للبيانات ذات الطابع الشخصي.

تجاوبت [@impact\\_gov](#) مع أسئلتنا موضحة كيف تحفظ البيانات على سيرفترات  
معينة، ووعدت بنشر سياسة خصوصية قريباً.

- From a quantitative perspective, the [@IMPACT\\_gov](#) Twitter account has gained nearly **300** followers (+57%) since the launch of the platform, generating more than **120** mentions, around than **92,000** impressions and **7,750** profile visits.
- Transparency was key during this initiative, allowing the platform to restore some of the long lost trust in state institutions.



## THE PERCEPTION: FROM SARCASM TO SUPPORT

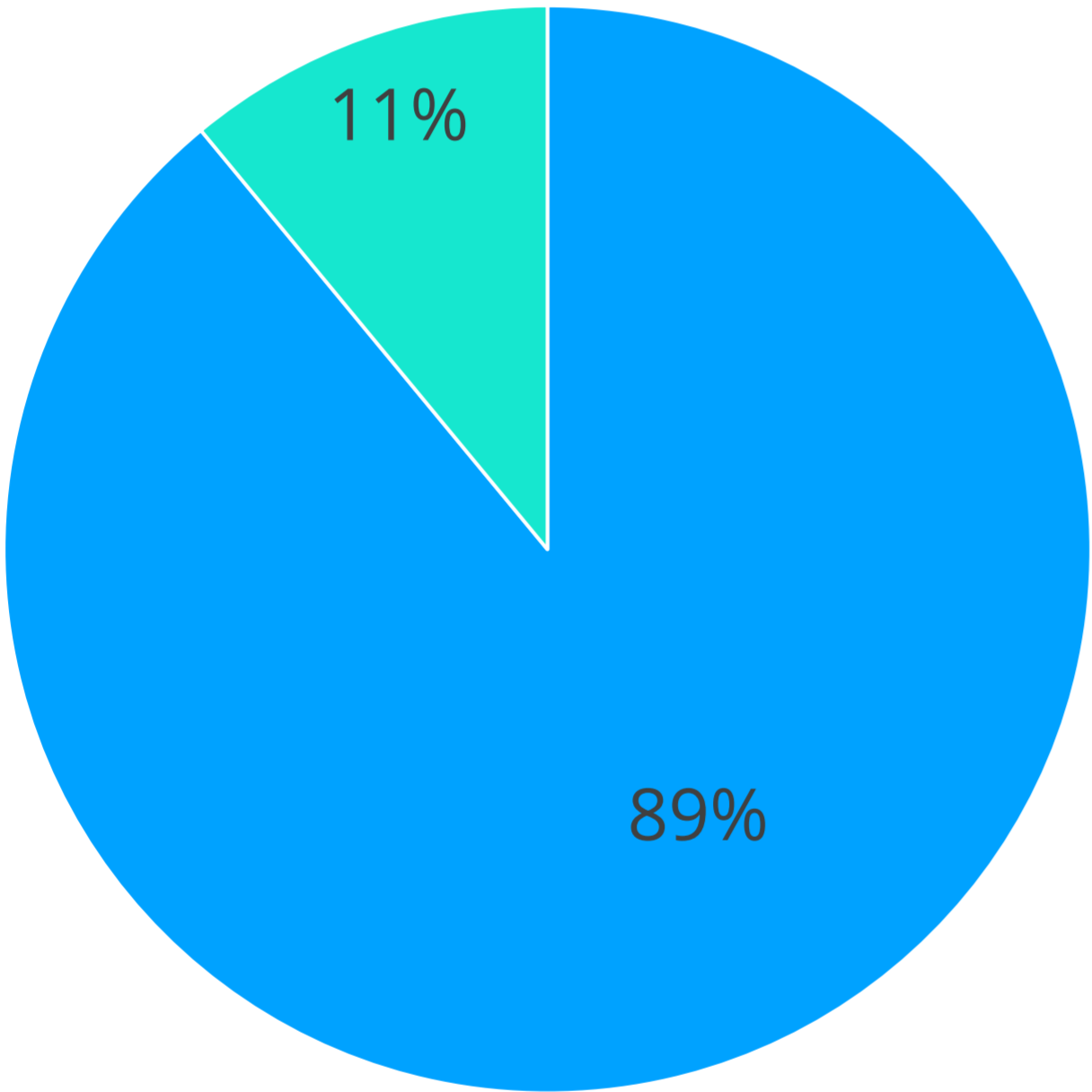
*The platform was praised by respondents as an efficient, useful and user-friendly tool, which highlights the shift in perception, from initial sarcasm to a more positive and constructive debate about the potential offered by digital solutions in sustaining the lockdown.*



# THE EFFECTIVENESS: PRESUMED COMPLIANCE

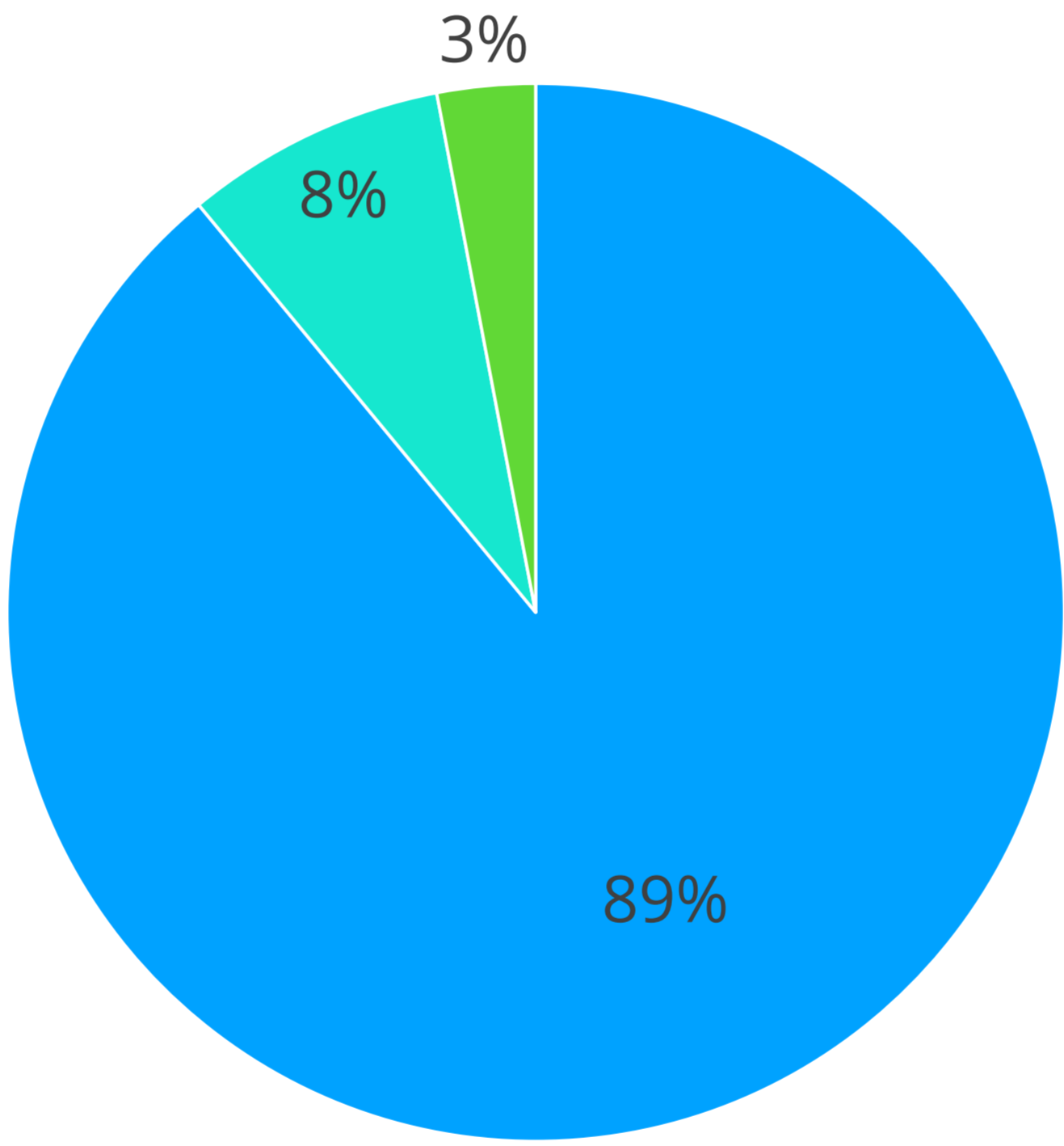
Most respondents declare always travelling with their approved mobility permits, showing interest in and compliance with the process. Yet, it is hard to assess whether the travel permits were initiated upon the actual reason for the required travel, which gets us to the ISF's responsibility: ensuring citizens mobility is indeed justified.

Did you travel during the lockdown period?



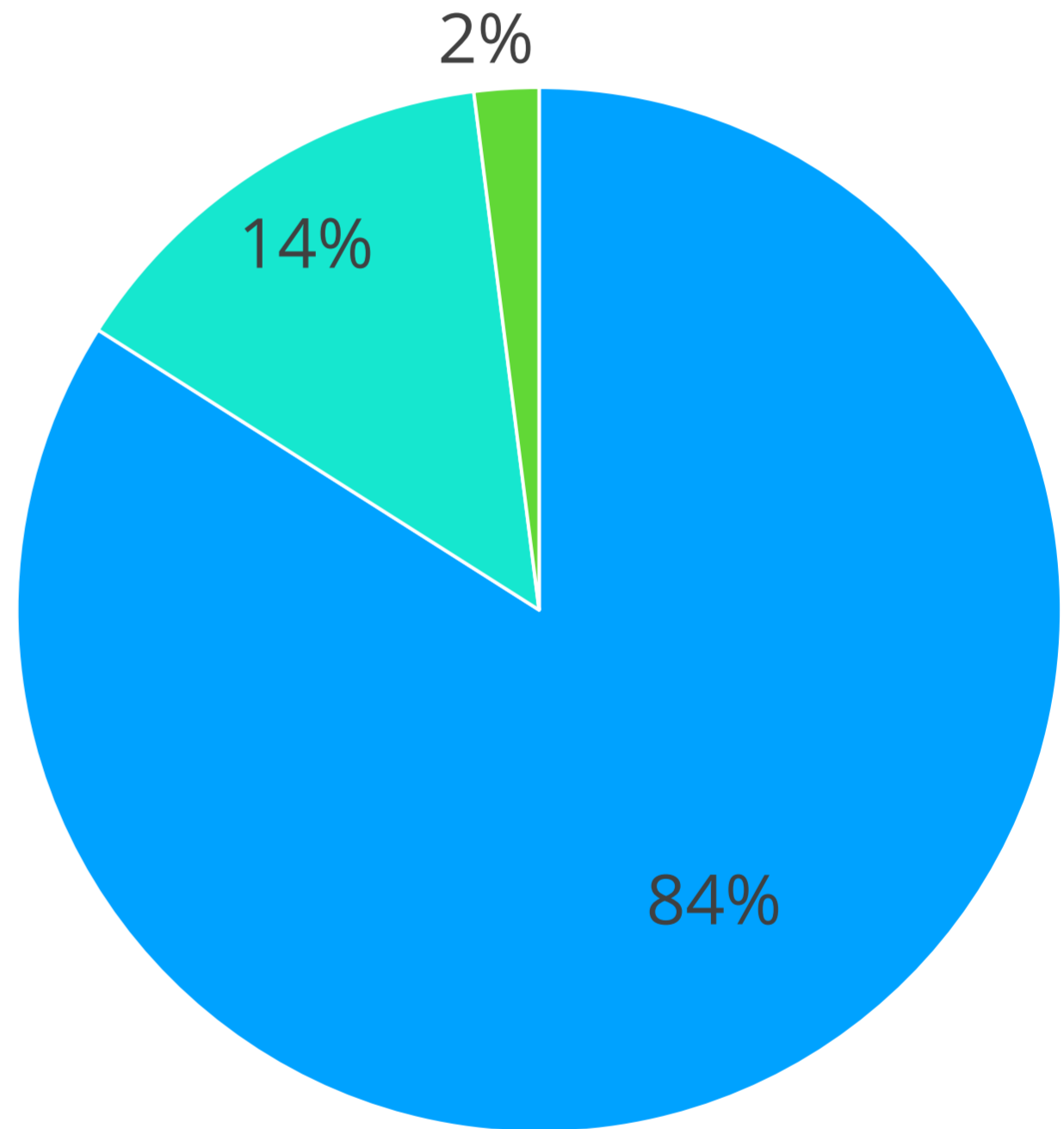
■ Yes ■ No

Did you issue a permit before going out?



■ Always ■ Sometimes ■ Never

Was your travel purpose within the list of reasons on IMPACT?



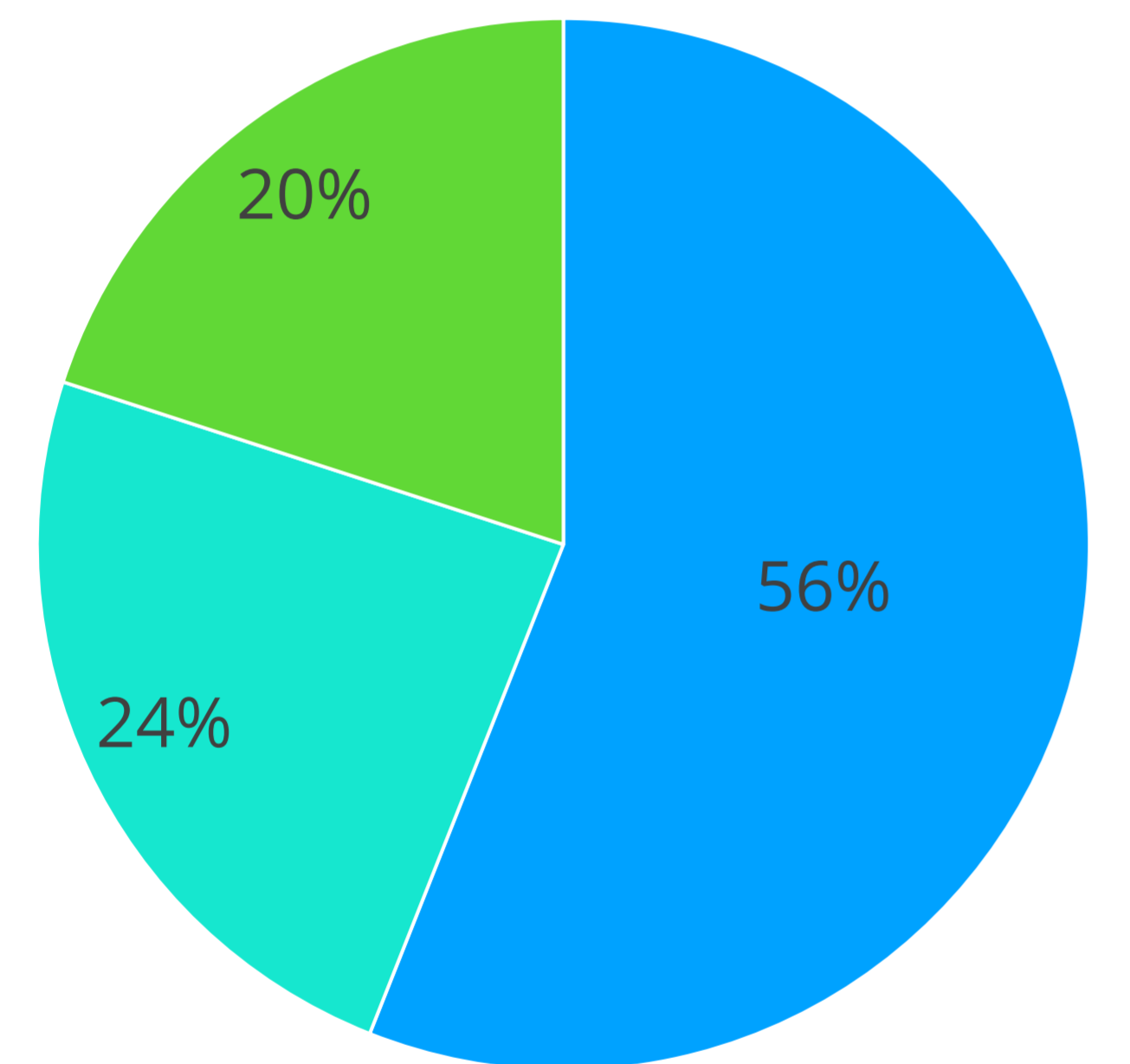
■ Yes ■ No ■ I don't know

- **89%** of respondents declared traveling during the lockdown, with most of them (**97%**) having “always” or “sometimes” issued a permit before going out, thereby showing high compliance.
- The majority of respondents (**84%**) stated that their travel reason was already listed on the digital form. The main motive missing from the list, according to respondents was urgent family issues and elderly support.

## THE RESPONSE: PRESENCE AND DISSUASION

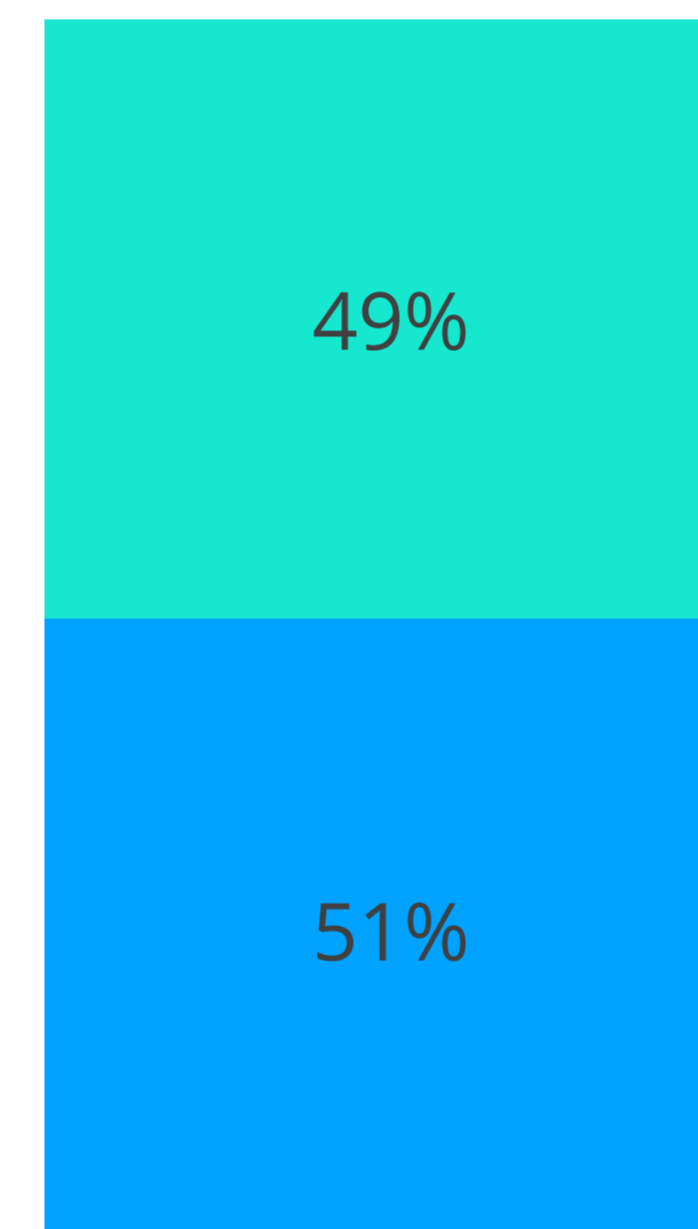
*With all eyes on ISF to see how the toughest lockdown to-date would be implemented, their presence on the ground seems to be duly noticed, and their impact on public compliance seems to be confirmed by the majority of respondents.*

How often did you notice ISF patrols on the streets?



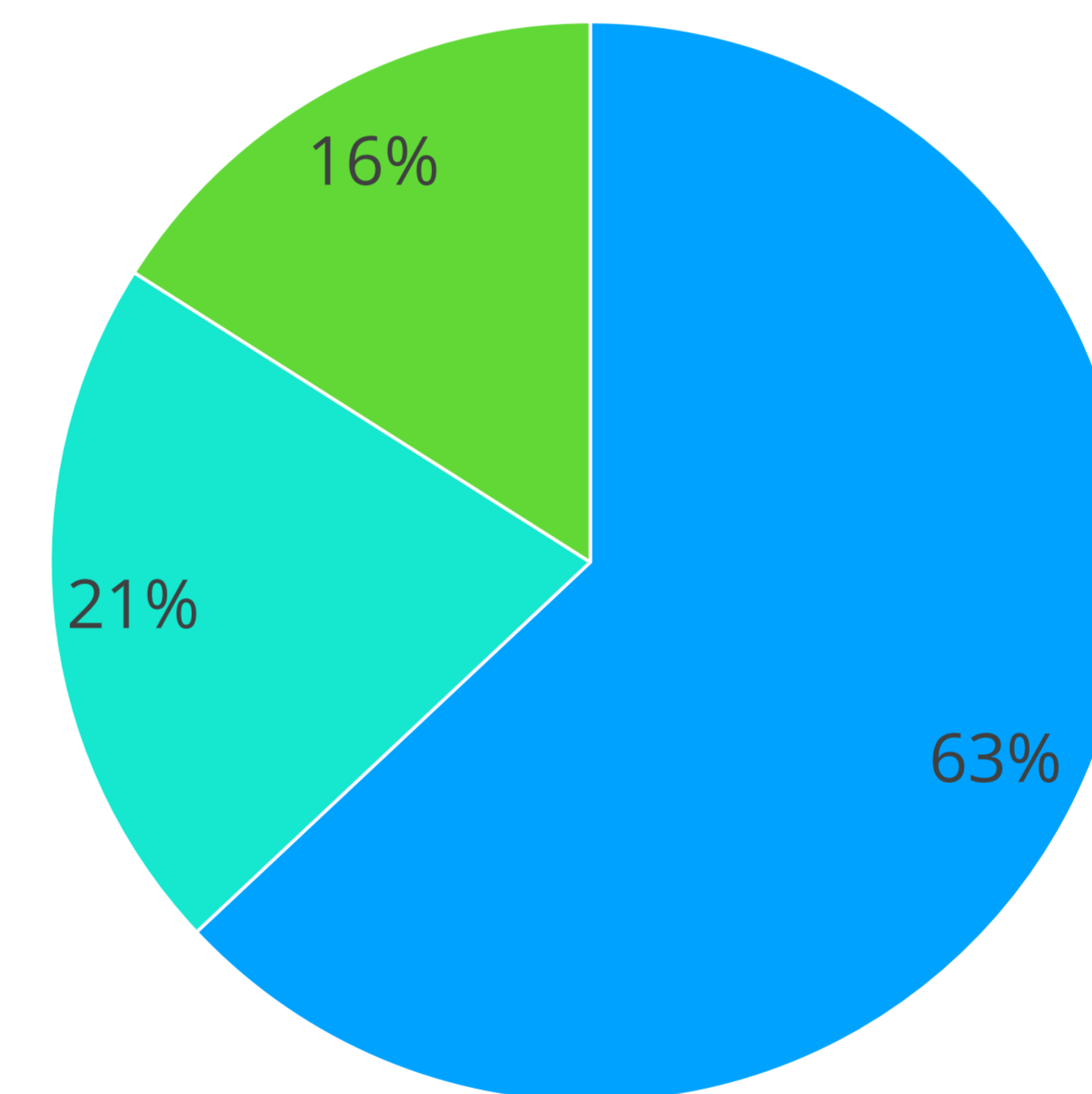
■ Always ■ Sometimes ■ Never

Were you stopped by an ISF checkpoint?



■ Yes ■ No

Do you think more ISF patrols would increase public compliance?



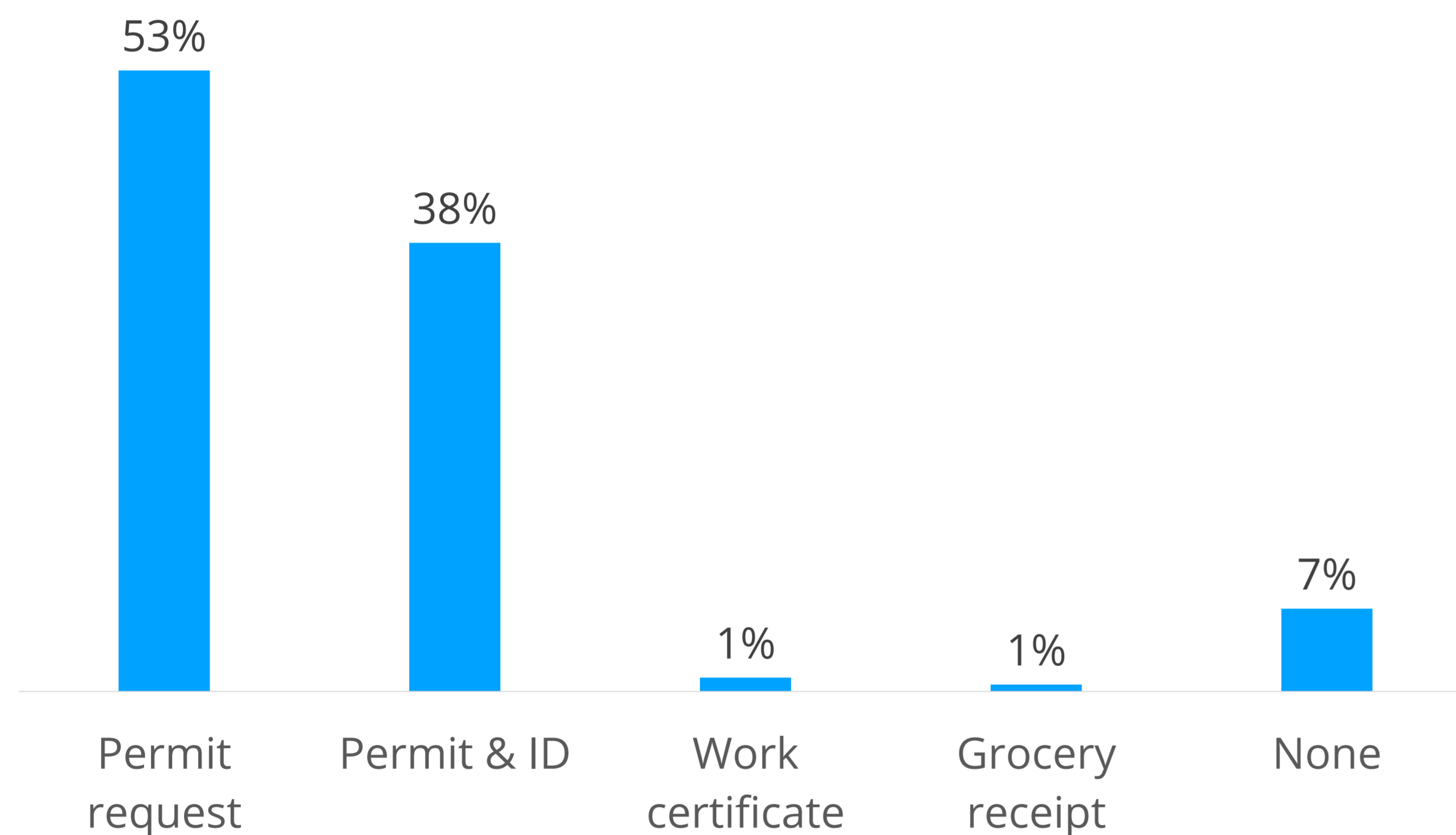
■ Yes ■ Maybe ■ No

- A majority of respondents (**80%**) indicates “always” or “sometimes” seeing ISF units and patrols on the streets, with most of them agreeing that this presence would increase public compliance with the lockdown restrictions (**63%**).
- Half of the respondents (**51%**) declare having been stopped by an ISF checkpoint while on the move.

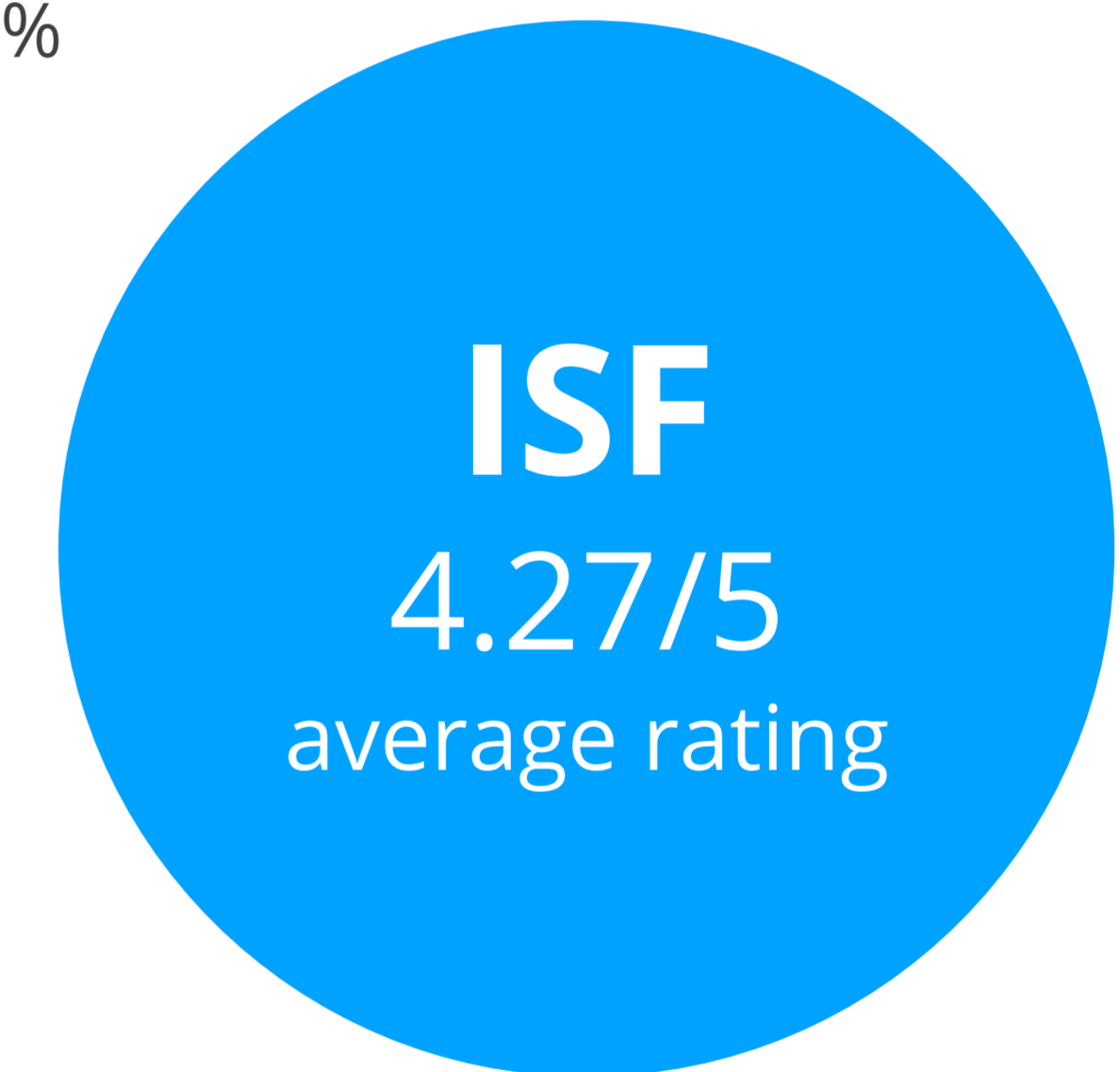
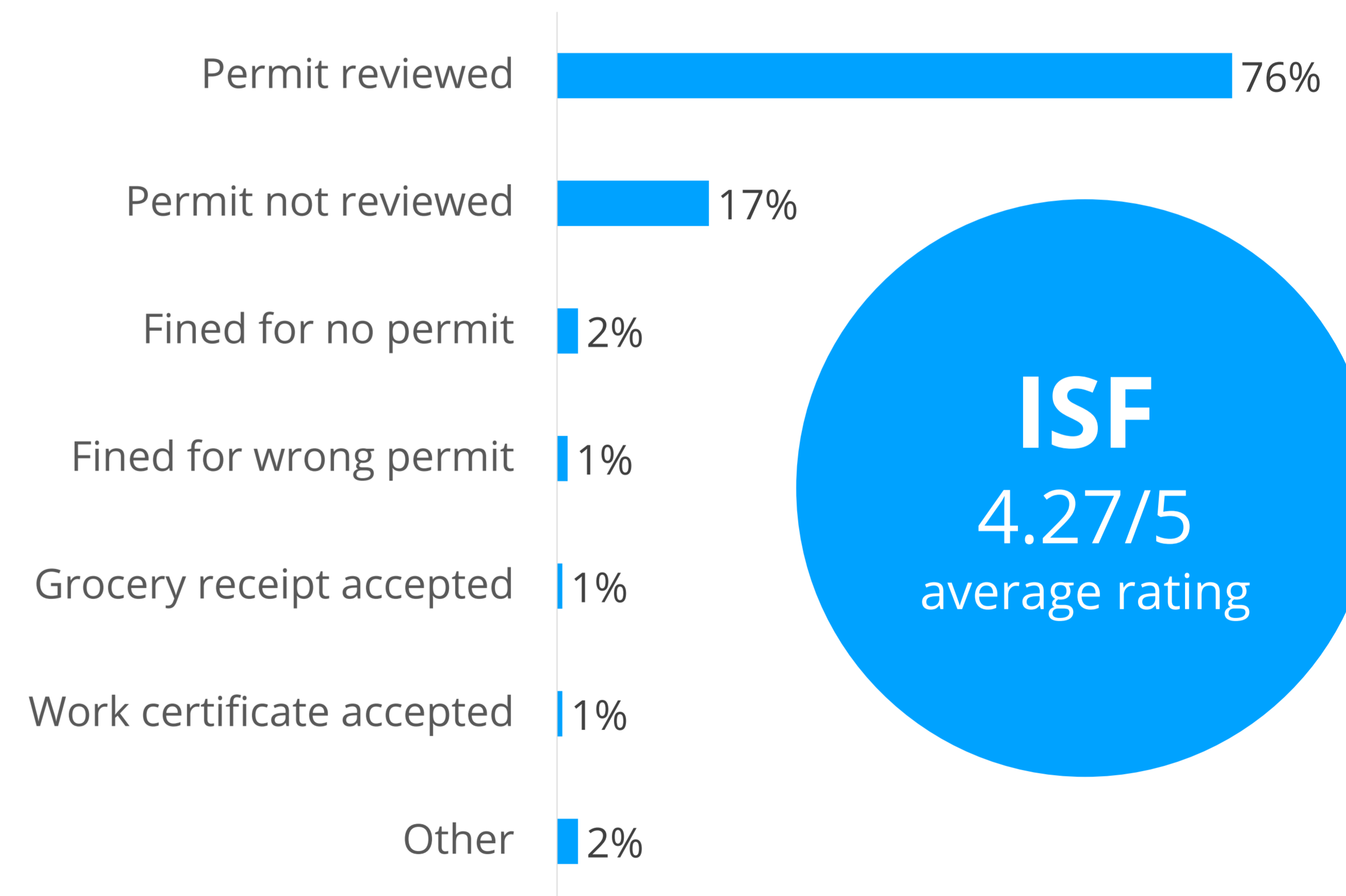
## THE INTERACTION: POSITIVE AND PRACTICAL

*The mobility permits process seems to have simplified ISF's work and management on the ground. This was reflected by a high rating of their interaction with citizens at checkpoints and by the proper use of the permits to confirm mobility motives.*

What documents did ISF ask you to show?



What action did ISF finally take?



- **91%** of respondents confirm that ISF checkpoints were relying on the permits delivered, with **76%** of them closely verifying the requests.
- **95%** of respondents who confirmed having their permits checked, highly rated ISF's performance with a score between 4-5 over 5.

# THE RECOMMENDATIONS: UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

*By using a digitally enhanced platform such as IMPACT, national authorities can rely on valuable data to better monitor practices, needs, and perceptions of citizens in times of an acute national health crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.*

## **Policymakers**

- **Rely** on systematic and regular data analysis through the platform to adjust policy decisions. This brief revealed a big interest in the digital instrument, but also uncovered the weaknesses of offering automated mobility permits which could allow movement for the wrong motives.
- **Trust** digitized data to monitor citizens habits, practices, and needs and integrate it into the policymaking process in order to implement sound and efficient mitigation measures against COVID-19. There is a lot of untapped potential in terms of behavioral data.
- **Consider** more engaged communications strategies to build trust with communities.
- **Revisit** the destinations to which exemptions are granted to help prevent abuses to the system and adjust the present list to other needs, such as family emergencies, security incidents (robberies, legal proceedings), or tightly planned grocery shopping.
- **Consider** supply chain and extend permits in a way that allows the economic performance to sustain the crisis.

## **Security Forces**

- **Strengthen** briefing of agents on patrol to properly validate mobility permits validity and increase checkpoints when possible.
- **Start** using the IMPACT QR scanner and monitor metrics to enhance patrol performance.
- **Develop** policy showing some flexibility when dealing with persons from vulnerable communities with no access to digital platforms.

## **Platform managers**

- **Work** on securing data privacy by asking for consent for data storing and ensure confidentiality of users data.
- **Rely** mainly on SMS broadcast for a quick and efficient way for reaching target audience.
- **Maintain** vigilance to identify and tackle system flaws, issues and malfunctions.
- **Enhance** coordination with relevant authorities to optimize content and use of digital tools.
- **Continue** engaging with the public as this proving to be effective in restoring some of the long lost trust in state institutions.

## **CSOs and Media**

- **Provide** continuous feedback and assessment to encourage keeping up to standards despite crisis pressure.



For more information on IMPACT, please visit:

<https://impact.cib.gov.lb>

To explore the mobility requests platform, you can go to:

<https://covid.pcm.gov.lb/>

And this is where you'll find data updates in real-time:

<https://impact.gov.lb/home/dashboard/lockdown-permissions>