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## Insights from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's Box Office Survey

Supported by thrive

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# Background and methodology

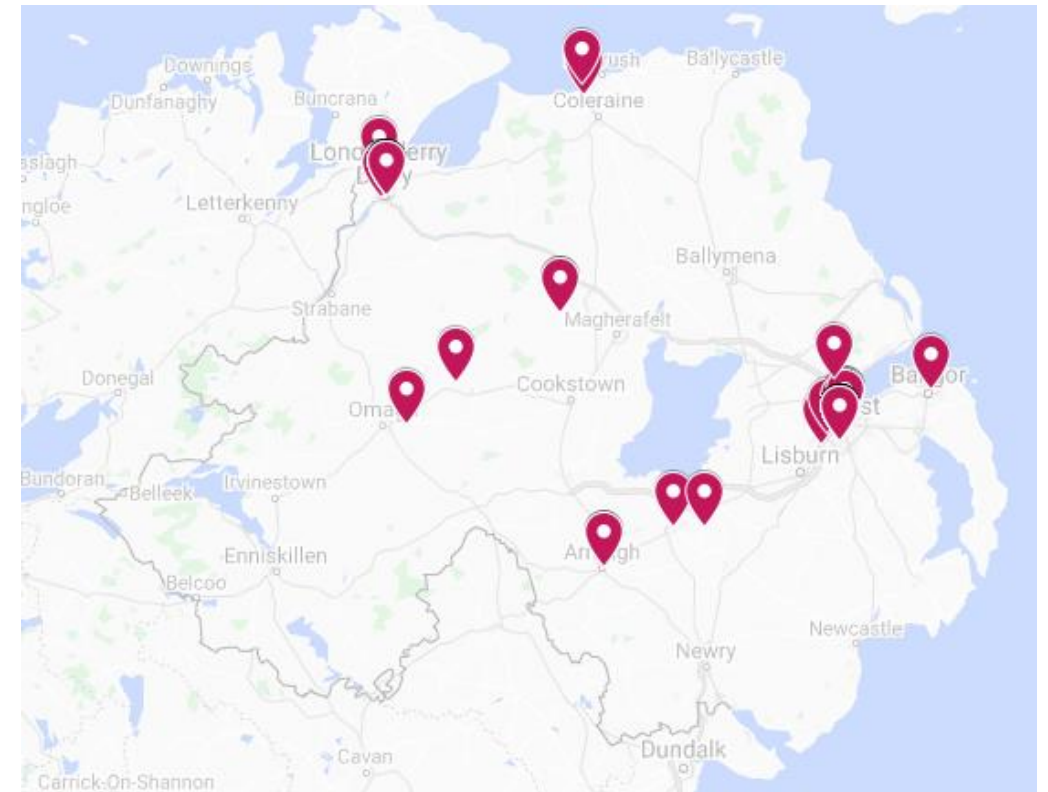
## What is the purpose of the survey?

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland wanted to find out how much ticketed cultural organisations were affected by Covid-19. Results from this survey will help ACNI to engage with NI Executive and local government as well as contributing to DCMS evidence and support planning for next steps with the NI arts sector.

## How was the research conducted?

- ACNI developed an online survey that was emailed to ACNI core-funded organisations and posted on social media channels. Arts Officers also asked client organisations to complete the survey.
- In total, 42 organisations responded:
  - This includes 29 ACNI core funded organisations, 10 funded by ACNI's other grant streams, and 3 not funded by ACNI
  - 10 venues, 6 festivals, and 26 other organisations responded to the survey
  - Responding organisations came from across Northern Ireland

## Map of organisations who responded to the survey



Source: Google Maps

Key findings  
and stats at a glance

# Arts Council of Northern Ireland Box Office Survey 2020: Key Findings

- **The pandemic has severely impacted box office revenue** – cultural organisations expect losses of £9.5 million in box office revenue
  - On average, organisations lost 72% of their box office revenue
  - This loss of box office revenue has a significant impact on cultural organisations, as it contributes to over half of venues' and festivals' earned income
- Cultural organisations also expect to lose nearly £5.3 million in ancillary income, including nearly £2.5m in food and drink revenue. This results in an estimated total of **£14.8 million in total losses among the 42 organisations surveyed**. The extent of this will be much larger across the wider sector.
- £1.3 million has gone towards refunds and vouchers, including £601k in refunds and £734k in vouchers.
- **The cultural sector reaches a wide audience**: among respondents, there were 750k tickets sold, 348k participations, 145k exhibition attendees, and 221k festival goers
- **The cultural sector also plays an important role in the economy**: the cultural organisations taking the survey employ a total of 535 full-time staff, 2,879 freelancer artists, and 1,425 volunteers.

# Arts Council of Northern Ireland Box Office Survey 2020: Stats at a glance



In total, cultural organisations expect losses of

**£9.5 million**

in box office revenue



On average, cultural organisations lost

**72%** of their anticipated 2020-21 box office revenue



They also expect losses of **£5.3 million in ancillary income**

This results in a total estimated loss of

**£14.8 million**



**£1.3 million**

has gone towards refunds and vouchers



Cultural organisations reach a wide audience – in 2019/20:

**They sold 750,000 tickets**  
**Reached 145,000 exhibition attendees**  
**And attracted 221,000 festival goers**



Cultural organisations play an important role, employing:

**535 full-time staff**  
**2,879 freelancer artists**  
**And 1,425 volunteers**

Findings in detail:  
Impact on cultural organisations

What was the impact of Covid-19  
on box office revenue?



The global pandemic has essentially **decimated** box office revenue

Cultural organisations in NI expect losses of

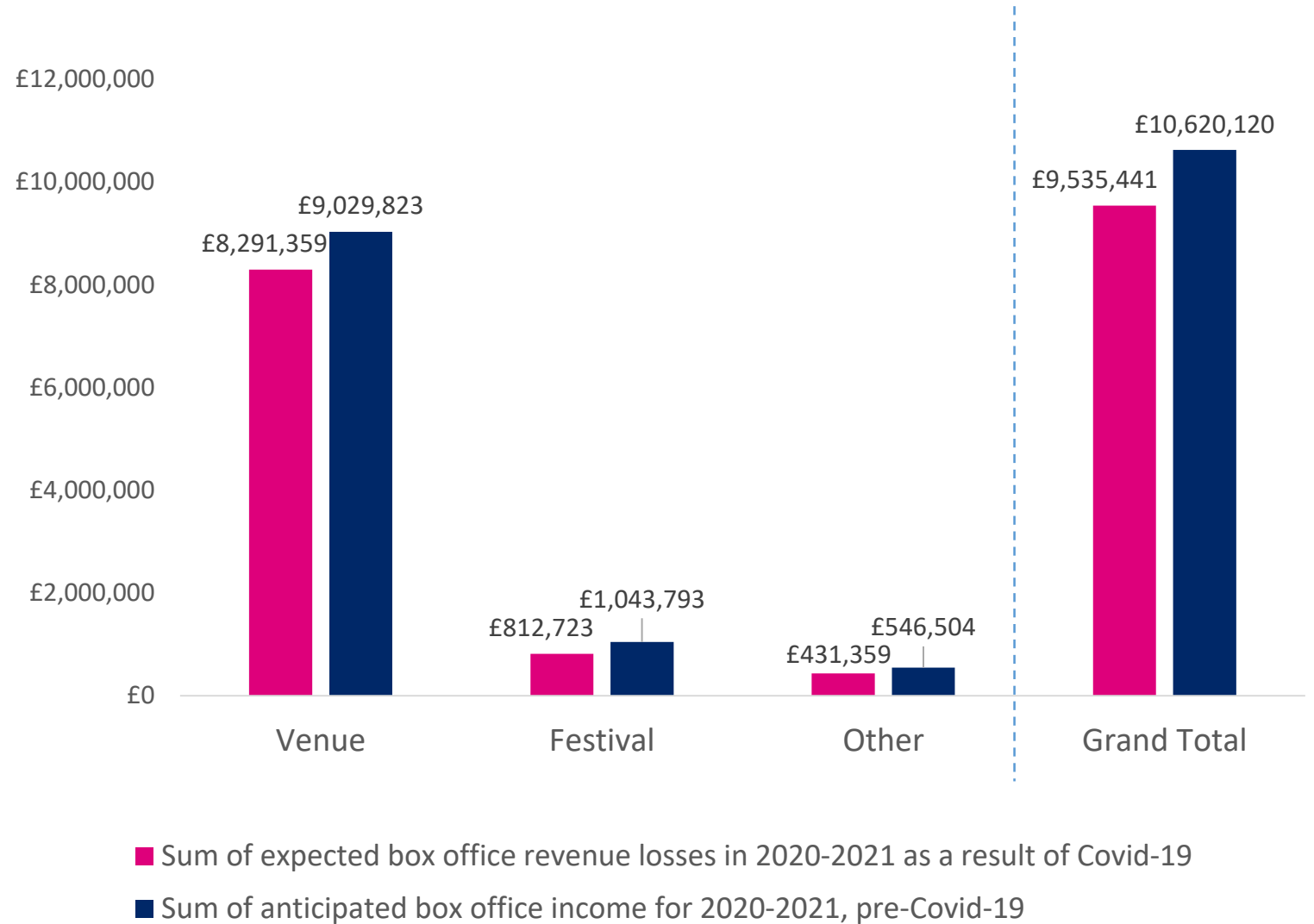
**£9.5 million**

in box office revenue alone

Of the different types of organisations surveyed, venues are hit the hardest, and expect losses of nearly £8.3 million.

While this is a large figure, it's to be expected, as venues make more in ticket sales compared to other types of organisations.

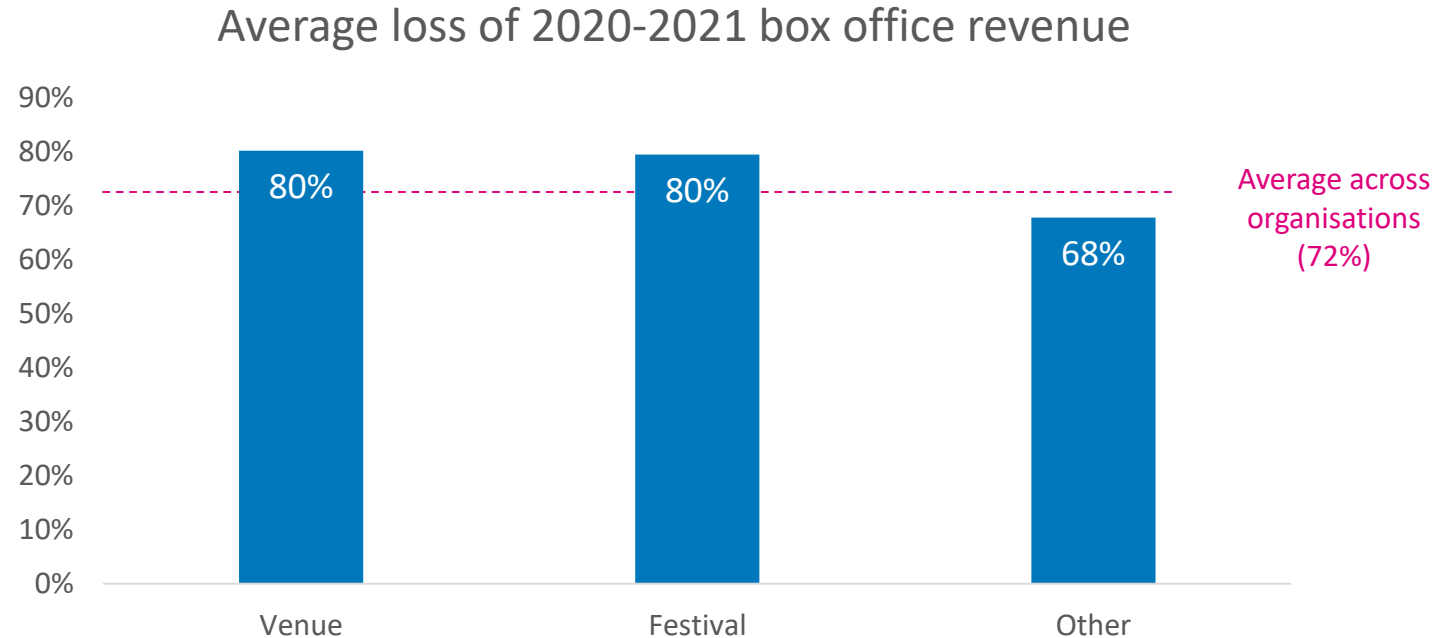
Expected box office losses compared to anticipated revenue in 2020-2021



## On average, organisations lost 72% of their box office revenue due to Covid-19

While revenue figures show us one picture, it helps to look at the percent of ticketing income lost in 2020-21, within each organisation.

This shows us the impact of the losses across the organisations.

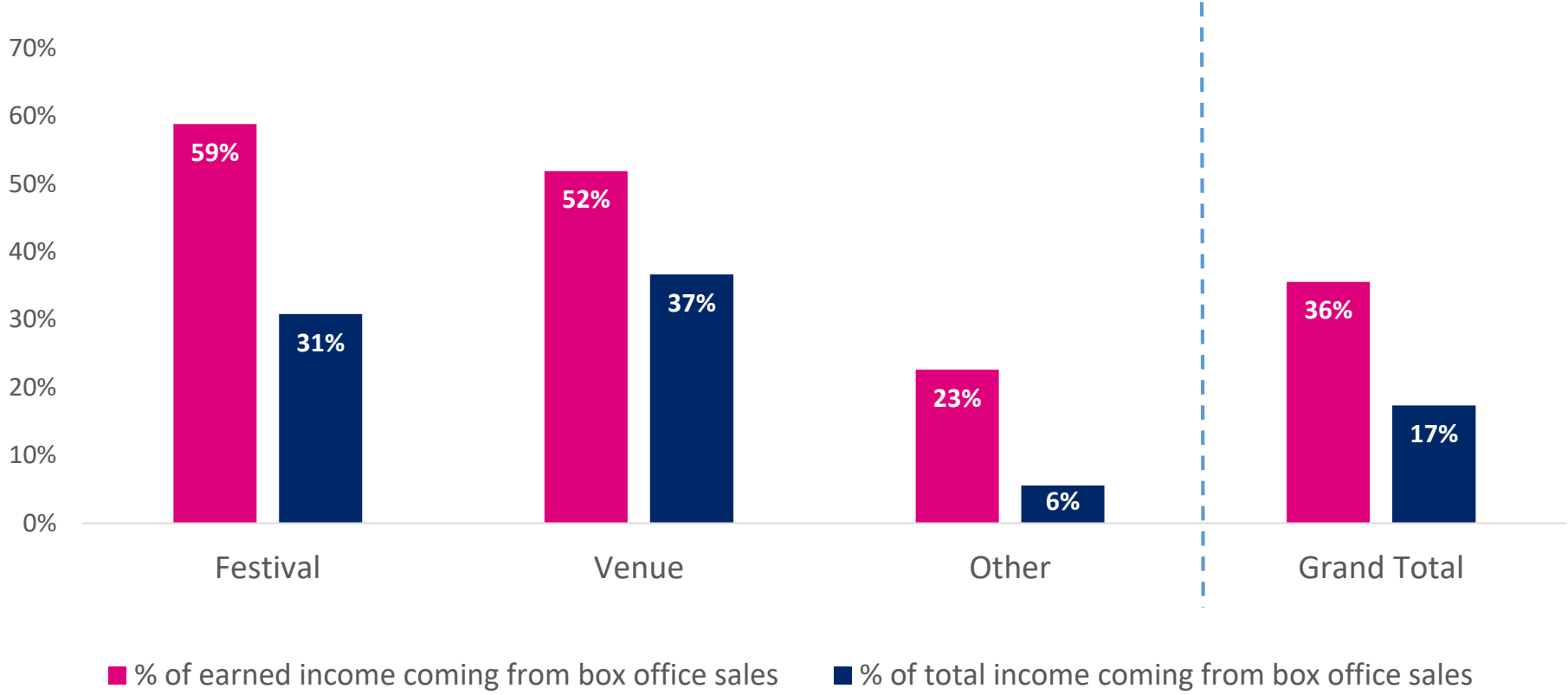


- Venues and festivals expect to lose a larger proportion of their ticketed income (80%) compared to the total average of 72%
- While those in the 'other' group expect to lose the lowest proportion of their ticketed income (68%), a subset of them (producing/touring organisations) expect to lose a lot – 85% of their ticketed income on average

Why is box office revenue  
important?

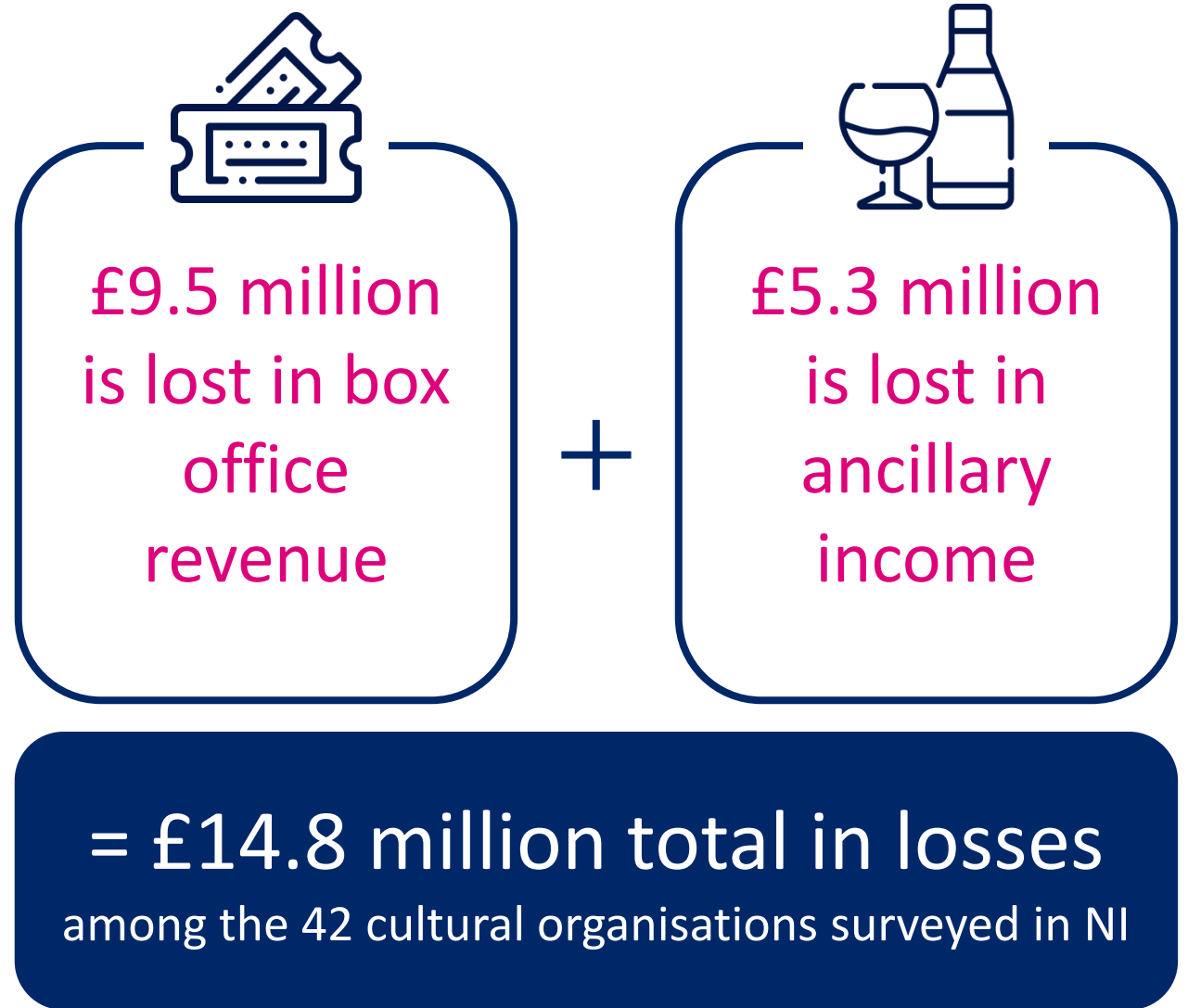
# Box office sales are an integral part of an organisation's revenue – it contributes to **over half** of festivals' and venues' earned income

Box office sales as a proportion of earned income and total income  
(Among ACNI RFO's, from 2019/20 funding applications)



Is there any additional impact on  
the organisations?

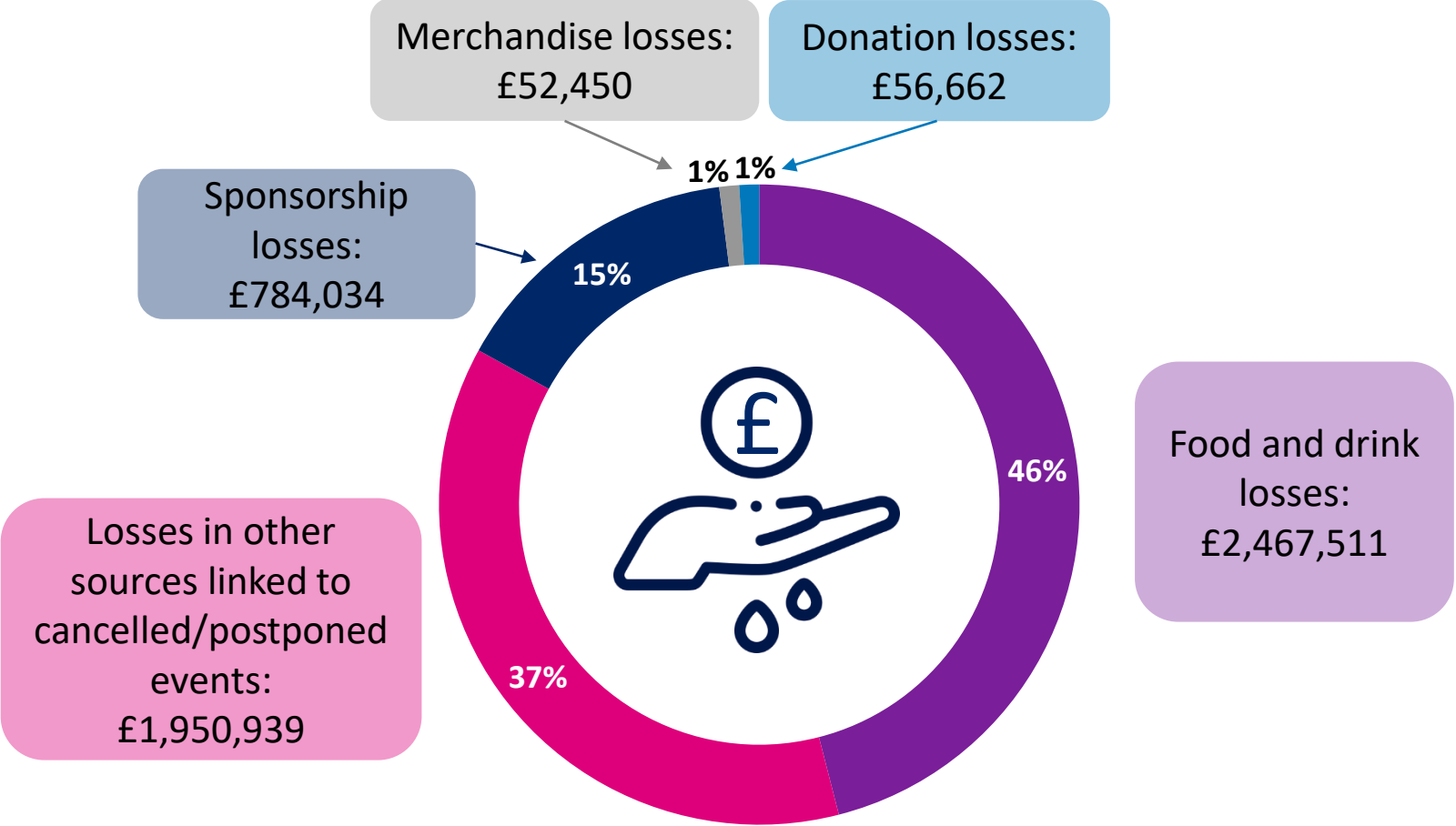
Yes – aside from losing revenue from ticket sales, cultural organisations expect to lose nearly **£5.3 million** in ancillary income



This highlights how ticket sales are just **one part** that helps to financially sustain cultural organisations.

# The biggest loss in ancillary income comes from food and drink – nearly £2.5 million

Breakdown of losses in ancillary income across the sector





## Losses in ancillary income by organisation type (Among ACNI RFO's)

Among the 29 ACNI Regularly Funded Organisations (RFO's) who took the survey, we looked at losses as a percent of total income in 2019/20.

Among RFO's, these represent an average of:

- A loss of 4% of total income from sponsorships
- A loss of 5% of total income from food/drink
- A loss of 7% of total income from sources linked to cancelled/postponed events
- Smaller losses of 0.1% in merchandise sales and 0.2% in donations

	No. of RFO's	Average losses from sponsorship	Average losses from food/drink	Average losses from merchandise sales	Average losses from donations	Average losses from sources linked to cancellations or postponements
Venue	7	1%	12%	0.1%	0.4%	4%
Festival	5	9%	9%	0.0%	0.5%	6%
Other	17	4%	1%	0.2%	0.1%	8%
<b>Average across RFO's:</b>		<b>4%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>7%</b>

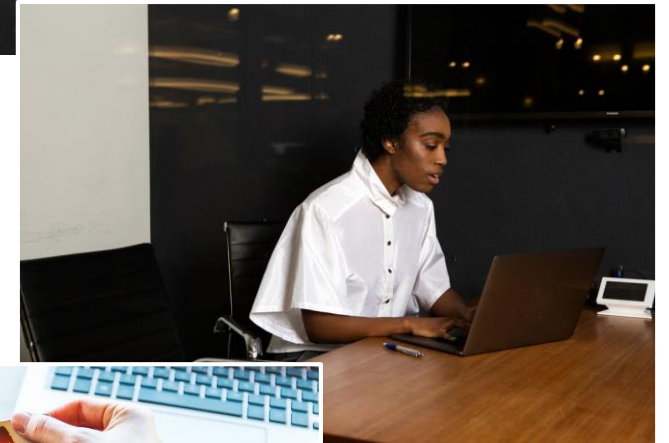
While all RFO's suffer losses, they are affected in different ways:

- Festivals are more likely to suffer losses from sponsorships (9% of their total income)
- Both venues and festivals suffer losses from food and drink (12% and 9% of their total income, respectively)

It's also important to understand that there are additional sources of earned income for cultural organisations, much of which has been wiped out due to Covid-19.

They include the following mentioned by organisations taking the survey:

- Private hires – these often result in additional revenue in food and drink
- Rent from tenants
- Revenue from tenders
- Donations through fundraising events



Have cultural organisations issued  
refunds or vouchers?

Yes, but not as much as you'd think



**£1.3 million in total**  
has gone towards  
refunds and vouchers

However, this is small  
compared to box office  
losses of  
**£9.5 million**

Other noted losses include £21k in bank charges associated with refunds

And of the £1.3 million  
in refunds and  
vouchers,



**£601k** have been **refunded** to customers

**£734k** are held as **vouchers** for future events



This impacts what organisations will make  
in revenue when they re-open

With over half of the amount held in vouchers, cultural organisations will be making even less income when they reopen, as customers redeem their vouchers

Findings in detail:  
Impact on the wider public

Do a lot of people engage in arts  
and culture in Northern Ireland?

# YES

Over 303,000 households in NI purchased tickets to a cultural activity between April 2016 and March 2019\*

Map of households who booked tickets to a cultural event between April 2016 and March 2019



*Note: The only areas without bookers are mountainous unpopulated areas, including the Mourne, the Sperrins, and Glenariff Forest.*

*\*Source: Thrive's Vital Statistics ticketing software, gathered among 26 ticketed cultural organisations in NI. This figure includes the possibility of multiple people booking tickets from within the same household.*



And, looking at the 29 ACNI core-funded organisations that took the survey, there were a reported:

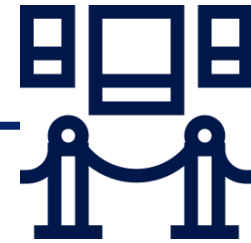
Financial year 2019-2020



750,000+  
tickets sold



348,000  
participations



145,000  
exhibition  
attendees



221,000  
festival goers



Not only do these organisations reach wide audiences, **they also provide vital jobs and income for Northern Ireland.**

The 29 ACNI core funded respondents contribute to the following:

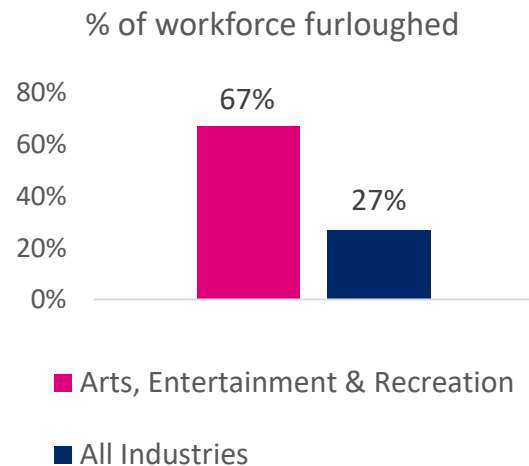
535  
Full-time staff

2,879  
Freelancer  
artists

1,425  
Volunteers

At the same time, the cultural sector has more than double the proportion of workers placed on furlough, and it's estimated that the sector may also experience a massive decline in economic losses

According to the [Office of National Statistics](#), 67% of people employed by the Arts, Entertainment and Recreation industry are furloughed, compared to the 27% All Industries average.



[Ulster University](#) also reports that it's estimated that the Arts, Entertainment and Recreation industry in the UK may experience a 90% decline in Q2 of 2020, which is among the highest of all industries, surpassing even the estimated losses of the Accommodation and Hospitality industry.

Estimates of economic output losses by sector, Q2 & Q3 2020

Sector	Assumed decline in Q2 by sector (%)	Assumed decline in Q3 by sector (%)
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	90%	45%
Education	90%	45%
Accommodation & Hospitality	85%	42.5%
Construction	70%	35%
Other Services	60%	30%
Manufacturing	55%	27.5%
Retail	50%	25%
ICT	45%	22.5%
Professional, Scientific & Technical Services	40%	20%
Administrative & Support Services	40%	20%
Transport	35%	17.5%
Real Estate	20%	10%
Public Administration	20%	10%
Agriculture	15%	7.5%
Mining, Energy & Water Supply	15%	7.5%
Financial Services	5%	2.5%
Health	+50%	+25%

Source: Ulster University and the Office of Budget Responsibility

Note: the quarters may not match exactly with their normal months, given that the 'restrictive' Q2 is more like mid-March to mid-June and the 'less restrictive' Q3 being potentially mid-June to mid-September

But what about the  
cultural audiences?



Audiences have continued to support the organisations surveyed despite personal financial difficulties, and donated a total of £48k.

This is nearly the same amount these organisations expected to lose in donations at the box office for 2020-21 (£56k).

This makes sense, as it backs up findings from Act 1 of Thrive's After the Interval survey, in which 60% of NI and ROI audiences said they miss supporting their local venue, and 76% thought it was appropriate for cultural charities to ask ticket buyers for a donation to a recovery fund.

Implications



# Implications of the results



- The pandemic hasn't just had a big impact on ticket sales, but also on **other sources of earned income**, namely food and drink
- Cultural organisations are also negatively affected in other ways – they have **suffered losses from private hires, rental income, and tenders**
- When organisations reopen, they will have a setback of £734k held in credit vouchers. As customers redeem their vouchers, this means that they will be making even **less** revenue.
- **Cultural organisations have a large impact on audiences** – not only do they reach a large number of audiences, but audiences have also continued to support these organisations through donations during the lockdown.
- Cultural organisations in Northern Ireland also **contribute to the economy**, employing a large number of staff, artists, and volunteers.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland developed this survey and report with support from thrive. This report was compiled by thrive using the survey data, data from ACNI RFO annual returns and thrive generated data. Thrive has compiled this report as part of its ACNI Annual Funding Award.



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