

# Author Experience survey 2021

## 1 Introduction

A total of 626 authors responded to our 2021 survey. We contacted authors who have published a Cochrane review in the last 2 years, so that we are capturing views from authors who have published reviews since our last survey in 2019.

The questions build on that previous survey and in some cases we have asked the same questions. You can read the previous survey results on the [Cochrane website](#).

Overall, the 2021 survey presents a positive picture for author satisfaction in Cochrane with many authors considering themselves highly satisfied or satisfied with the experience, and also considering the experience better than that of working with other journals. This is useful for us to know, but there is also a rich source of feedback that has accompanied the quantitative results and we will be working our way through that to understand how we can do better in future.

This year we particularly wanted to explore questions around open access to inform our work in this area. We are currently working through our options for our future open access model for Cochrane, building on the success of our current model that makes content available after 12 months as standard or immediately when a Gold article processing charge is paid. The data we have collected has given us a snapshot of our author base and the funding context within which they work. Thank you to everyone who took the time to respond to those questions.

A new question that was added to this survey, compared with the 2019 survey, was around the use of evidence in practice and it was very encouraging to see that just under half of respondents said that their review has had an impact in policy making or other decision-making. We

have collected references where they have been provided as this is an important source of information for us to understand how Cochrane Reviews are having an impact in the world.

Overall, the demographics information collected tells us that we have had responses from a broad range of authors. Respondents come from a wide range of points in their career, from students to those who have more than 30 years of experience. More than half of respondents selected a language other than English as their first language. There were a range of responses to the number of reviews that respondents had authored from first time reviewers to those who have authored more than 6 Cochrane reviews. The respondents make up about 10% of the authors contacted.

There are some important limitations to this survey, including:

- The survey was of authors who have completed their reviews, so is not representative of our entire author base.
- By design, the survey won't provide insights from people who choose to publish elsewhere. It is interesting to note that journal profile and impact factor are motivating factors for our contributors, so whilst increases in IF will likely draw some people in, other considerations are also at play and follow up surveys of authors who do not publish reviews in Cochrane would help to explore this further.
- The survey was open to all authors of reviews published in the last two years, and so there could be multiple responses from the same author team.

In the report below you will find details of all of the quantitative results and summary comments about the free text comments. We hope this is useful to the community.

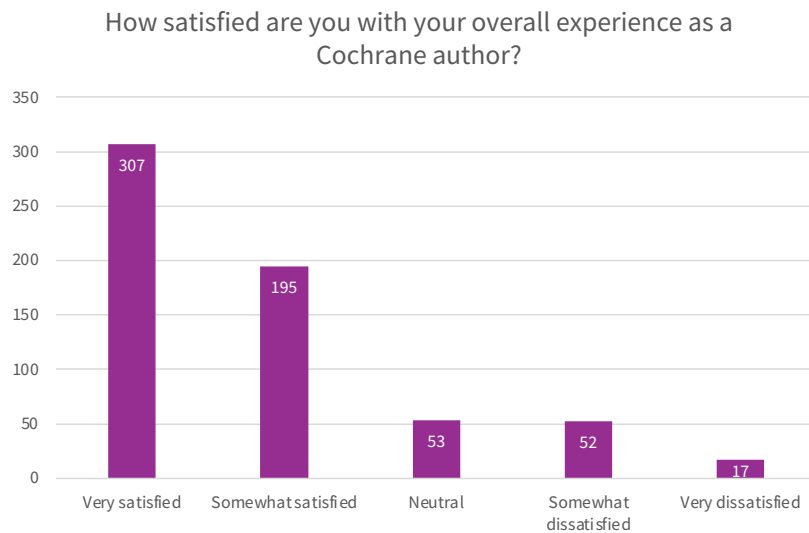
If you have any questions about this survey or wish to know more about any particular point, please contact the Chris Champion, Head of People Services, [cchampion@cochrane.org](mailto:cchampion@cochrane.org).

## Contents

1	Introduction	1	12	How many Cochrane reviews have you contributed to as an author?	15
2	Satisfaction with overall Cochrane experience.	3	13	What type(s) of reviews have you written for Cochrane? Select all that apply	15
3	Cochrane compared with other journals and likelihood of authoring another review.	3	14	Please select your work status or primary place of work	16
4	Factors attracting you to publish with Cochrane and more generally when choosing journals	4	15	How many years of experience do you have in your field of expertise?	16
5	Satisfaction with the tools and software you have used.	7			
6	Challenges or issues encountered in authoring with Cochrane?	8			
7	Successes or positive experiences in authoring with Cochrane?	8			
8	Questions to inform our open access development work	9			
9	Has your review contributed or led to further research, policy-making or decision-making?	11			
10	What country do you live in?	13			
11	What is your primary language?	14			

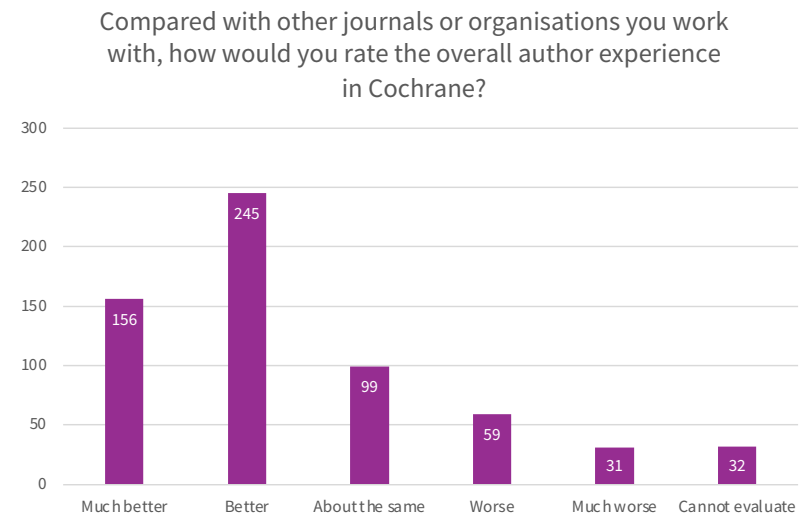
## 2 Satisfaction with overall Cochrane experience.

Overall, author satisfaction remains high and comparable with previous surveys<sup>1</sup>. There were additional narrative comments explaining ratings. Some included comments around differing experiences with different Cochrane Groups, which highlights that it is not always easy to give a single rating like this.



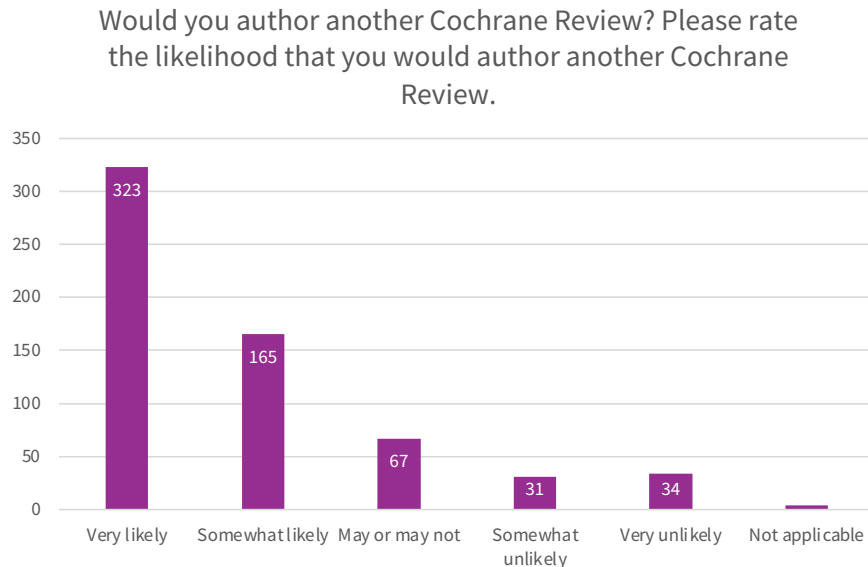
## 3 Cochrane compared with other journals and likelihood of authoring another review.

Around two thirds of respondents felt that working with Cochrane is better than other journals. This result is similar to the 2019 survey, where around 70% of respondents rated Cochrane better than other journals.



<sup>1</sup> We previously asked people how satisfied they are with the overall experience of being a Cochrane author on a scale of 0 (*Not good at all*) to 5 (*Very good*). For this question, in 2019, we received an average score for all respondents which was **3.9**.

Approximately half of the respondents would author another Cochrane review. This is an important metric for Cochrane given that the process of writing a Cochrane Review is challenging, and so retaining experienced authors is important.



## 4 Factors attracting you to publish with Cochrane and more generally when choosing journals

The factors listed in the survey were mostly well appreciated by authors. The most highly rated factor was systematic review tools and software provided by Cochrane with 57% of respondents rating this as very

important and 87% of respondents rating this either very important or somewhat important.

The lowest rated factor was Cochrane’s consumer involvement infrastructure, but this was still rated as very important or somewhat important by half of respondents, so it is still an important factor, even if it is not as significant a factor as the others.

It is interesting to note that the ratings ‘not at all important’ or ‘not very important’ were hardly used, which suggests that whilst some of these factors may be more important than others, people appreciate them all to some degree.

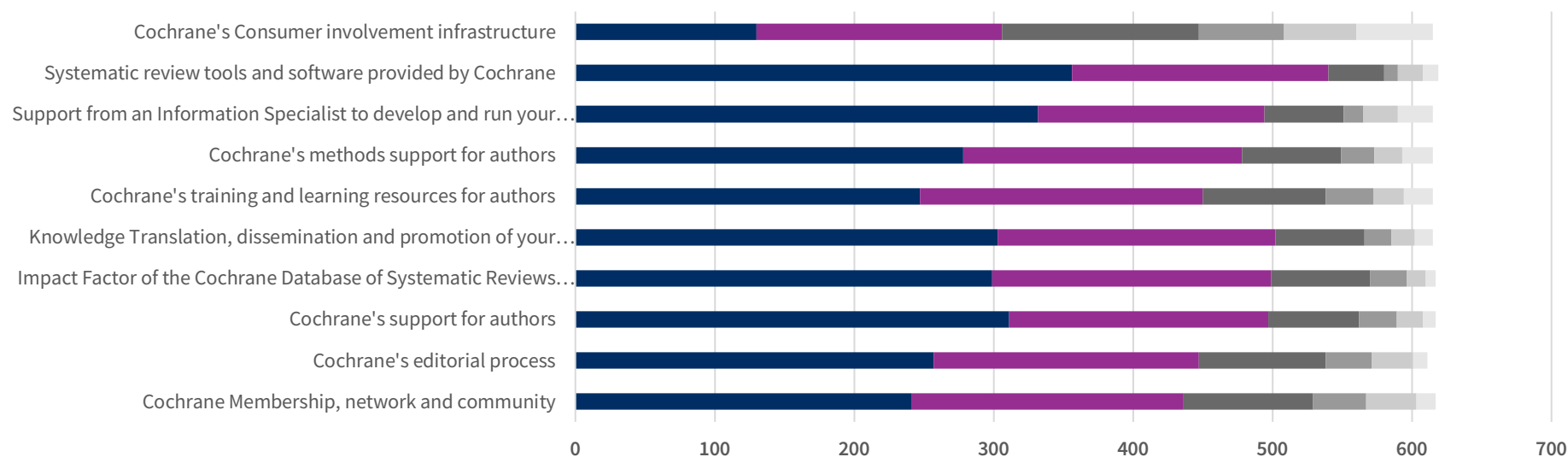
91 respondents provided further information in response to this question. Many of these responses reinforced the message around the positive impact of Cochrane’s editorial and author support, which corresponds with the quantitative data below. There were also a number of people who highlighted the importance of collaboration in choosing to work with Cochrane.

The questions around what factors people consider when selecting journals to publish their work are useful for us in our product development work for the Cochrane Library and other potential new products.

The quantitative data is presented below in full and, as is clear in the second chart, there are a range of responses with certain elements not scored highly. High scoring factors included scope, impact factor and indexing.

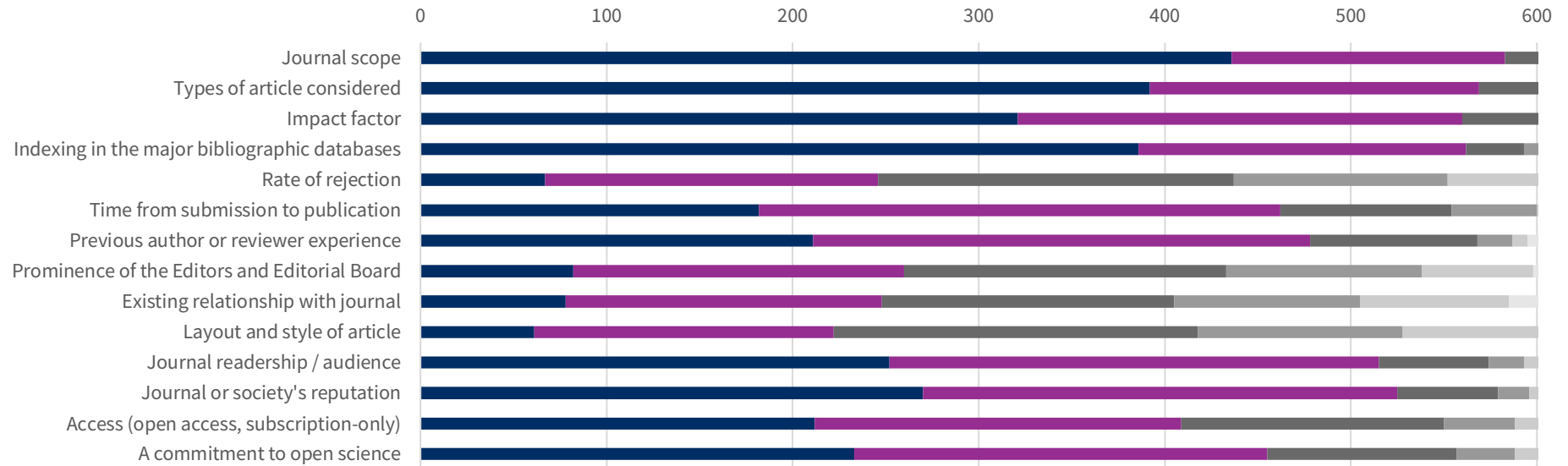
34 additional comments were left by respondents, and the most common theme was in relation to open access, where (11 of 34) people emphasised the financial challenges for authors when choosing journals. This theme is picked up again later in the questions around open access.

### How important were these factors in attracting you to publish with Cochrane?



	Cochrane Membership, network and community	Cochrane's editorial process	Cochrane's support for authors	Impact Factor of the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR)	Knowledge Translation, dissemination and promotion of your published work	Cochrane's training and learning resources for authors	Cochrane's methods support for authors	Support from an Information Specialist to develop and run your literature searches	Systematic review tools and software provided by Cochrane	Cochrane's Consumer involvement infrastructure
Very important	241	257	311	299	303	247	278	332	356	130
Somewhat important	195	190	186	200	199	203	200	162	184	176
Neither important nor unimportant	93	91	65	71	64	88	71	57	40	141
Not very important	38	33	27	26	19	34	24	14	10	61
Not at all important	36	30	19	14	17	22	20	25	18	52
Cannot evaluate	14	10	9	7	13	21	22	25	11	55

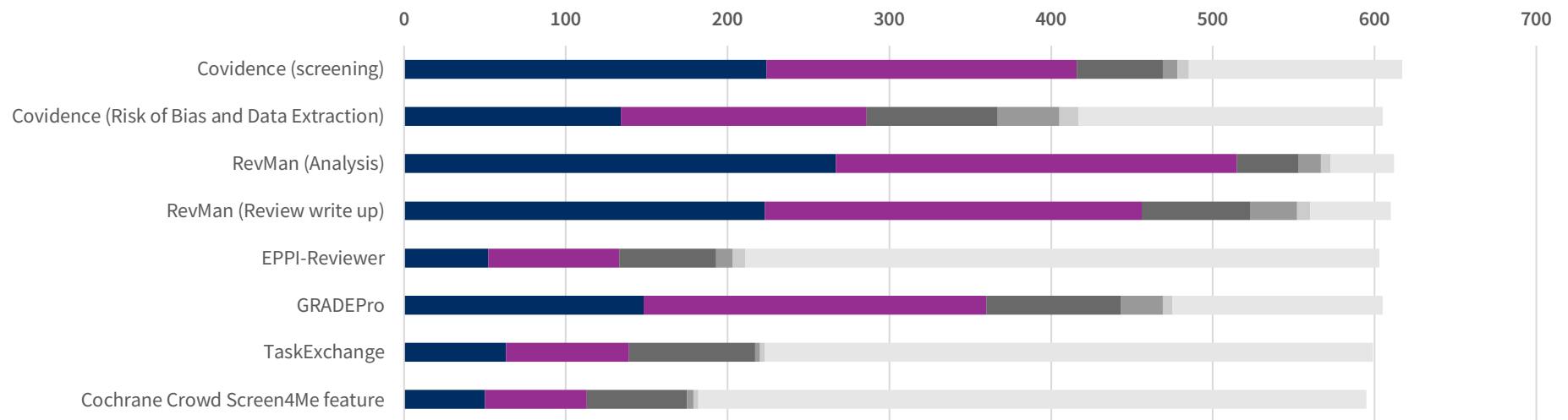
In general, when deciding what journal to submit your work to, how important are the following considerations?



	A commitment to open science	Access (open access, subscription-only)	Journal or society's reputation	Journal readership / audience	Layout and style of article	Existing relationship with journal	Prominence of the Editors and Editorial Board	Previous author or reviewer experience	Time from submission to publication	Rate of rejection	Indexing in the major bibliographic databases	Impact factor	Types of article considered	Journal scope
Very important	233	212	270	252	61	78	82	211	182	67	386	321	392	436
Somewhat important	222	197	255	263	161	170	178	267	280	179	176	239	177	147
May or may not be important	102	141	54	59	196	157	173	90	92	191	31	43	35	19
Not very important	31	38	17	19	110	100	105	19	46	115	10	8	2	6
Not at all important	17	17	10	10	74	80	60	8	6	49	4	4	3	3
Cannot evaluate	6	8	3	6	10	28	13	11	6	11	4	3	4	4

## 5 Satisfaction with the tools and software you have used.

Cochrane and our partners have developed tools and software aimed at making the systematic review process more efficient. Rate your satisfaction with the tools and software you have used.



	Cochrane Crowd Screen4Me feature	TaskExchange	GRADEPro	EPPI-Reviewer	RevMan (Review write up)	RevMan (Analysis)	Covidence (Risk of Bias and Data Extraction)	Covidence (screening)
Very satisfied	50	63	148	52	223	267	134	224
Satisfied	63	76	212	81	233	248	152	192
Neutral	62	78	83	60	67	38	81	53
Dissatisfied	4	3	26	10	29	14	38	9
Very dissatisfied	3	3	6	8	8	6	12	7
Did not use	413	376	130	392	50	39	188	132

The earlier question around factors that attract people to Cochrane highlighted the importance of the tools and software that we make available to authors. This chart demonstrates that there is a good degree of satisfaction with our tools and services, though there is room for improvement.

## 6 Challenges or issues encountered in authoring with Cochrane?

342 individuals responded to this question. The most consistent message in the feedback, more than a third of the comments, was that the process is too long, referring both to the total time to produce the review and the editorial and peer review timelines. There was also a frequent theme around receiving contradictory feedback from different people in the editorial process which further delays work.

*“sometimes the timeline is very long and when we finish the review and the search will be outdated and we need to repeat the process”*

*“Very long process with repeated and sometimes partly contradictory remarks”*

Another key theme was change in methods, tools and processes and particularly the impact that has on work in progress or updating reviews.

*“Every time I turn around something has changed. My old reviews are hard to update because none of the previous screening etc (pre-covid) is at electronic fingertips. It's all on paper. As soon as I get familiar with one iteration of a programme like RevMan it's changed for the next update. I'm not techie so thinking about updates is off-putting from the technical side rather than the actual reviewing/writing.”*

There were other individual comments, but these were on a broad range of topics and so are not reported here.

## 7 Successes or positive experiences in authoring with Cochrane?

336 people responded to this question. The key theme that emerged from the responses centred around support, particularly the personalised support from editorial teams.

*“A big positive is all the support that I received. The methodology is very clear so it is easy to navigate with good guidance documentation and always someone at the end of an email to help with any queries.”*

*“Wonderful support and guidance. I feel confident in the review thanks to the great oversight.”*

Many respondents also noted that writing their review was an important learning experience for them.

*“The experience of authoring a Cochrane review was invaluable. I was able to expand my expertise in my field of interest, evaluate the information using a structured and rigorous approach, then share the new knowledge.”*

Respondents also noted a wide range of other positives, including: the benefits of Cochrane's relationship with WHO and use of Cochrane reviews in WHO guidelines; support from information specialists; methods resources; and software tools.



## 8 Questions to inform our open access development work

To inform the development of our open access model it is important to understand the funding status of our author teams and access to open access funds.

We also wanted to understand to what extent authors are volunteers or working in a paid capacity when authoring Cochrane reviews. Similar work has been undertaken in the past to understand to what extent author teams are funded to do their work and what impact that has<sup>2</sup>.

### How your Cochrane Review was funded.

By a government	68
By a non-government body or organisation	61
My review was not funded	488

### Open access publishing requirements for your review.

Yes, it had to be published open access	42
No, there were no requirements	82

### Did your funding provide funds to pay open access publishing fees?

Yes: 52; No: 71.

### How was the time that you spent working on your Cochrane Review funded?

My time was paid for as part of funding for the Cochrane Review	30
My time was paid for as part of my regular employment	251
My time was not paid for, it was a voluntary contribution	332

### If you were writing your review as part of your employment, does your employer / institution have requirements for your research to be published open access?

Yes: 94; No: 330; Unsure: 149.

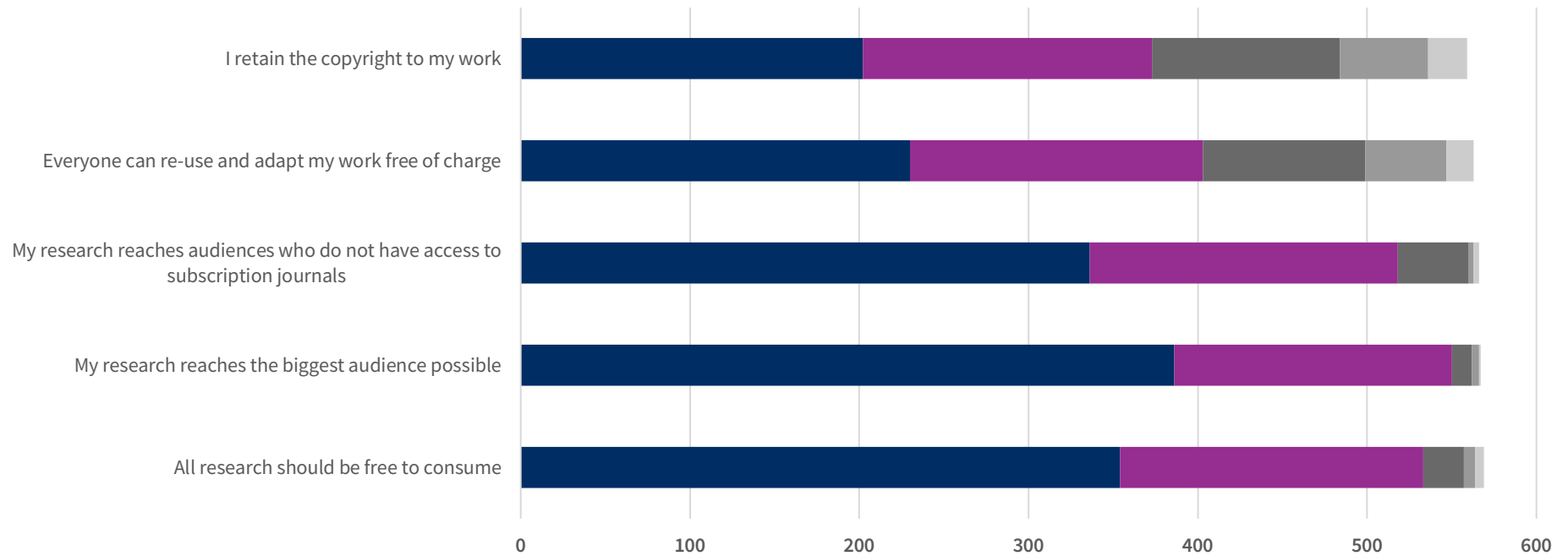
### Does your employer/institution cover open access fees?

Yes: 40; No: 33; Unsure 21.

<sup>2</sup> <https://abstracts.cochrane.org/2012-auckland/are-volunteers-authoring-cochrane-reviews-brief-investigation>

## What elements of open access are important for you personally?

How important are the following for you personally



	All research should be free to consume	My research reaches the biggest audience possible	My research reaches audiences who do not have access to subscription journals	Everyone can re-use and adapt my work free of charge	I retain the copyright to my work
Very important	354	386	336	230	202
Somewhat important	179	164	182	173	171
Neither important nor unimportant	24	12	42	96	111
Not very important	7	4	3	48	52
Not at all important	5	1	3	16	23

### Other comments about open access

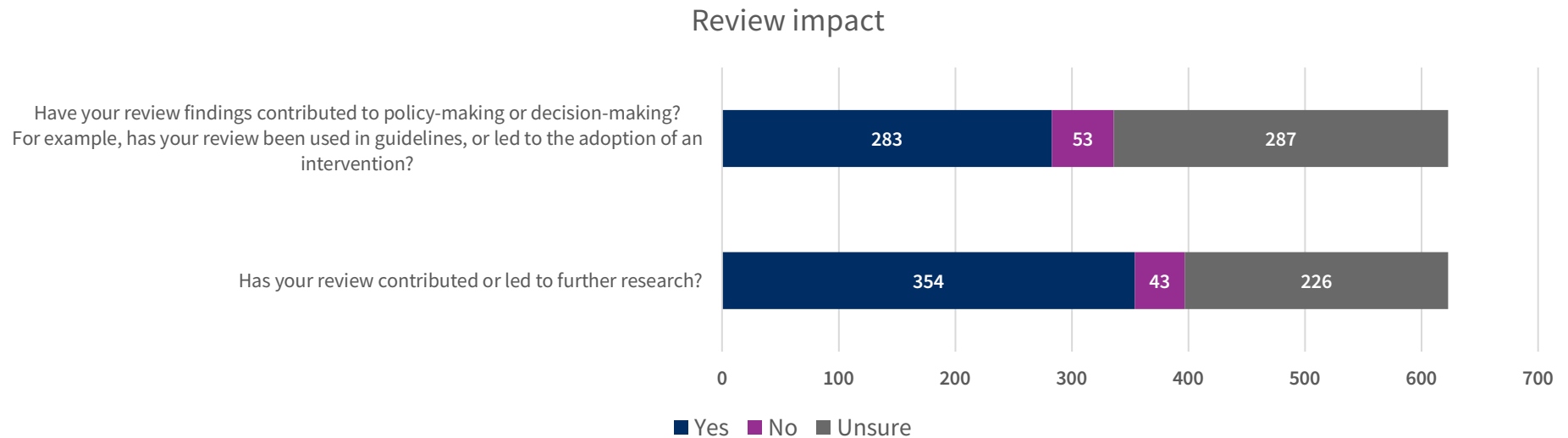
78 respondents provided additional comments about open access and of those, 26 were in some way related to the cost of open access. This is broken down into two main categories, people who felt that open access is too expensive for authors (where we assume that respondents are talking about traditional article processing charges being too high), and people who are supportive of the move to open access, but are advocating for costs to be kept low or for support for authors to meet the costs.

Amongst those highlighting the cost issues, there were concerns about the particular impact this could have on authors from low and middle

income countries, e.g. *“I fear it will exclude many researchers in low income countries who wish to publish, making science even more western-dominated. The attention has all been on the laudable issue of free access, but unrealistic about where funds will come from for authors, and insufficiently challenging the profit margins of publishers.”* And, *“Publication fee in many journals are very high, and cannot afford by unfunded projects, specifically from low- and middle income countries.”*

Around 19 respondents were very supportive of the move to open access and emphasised the role it has in broadening the reach of research, e.g. *“My research findings should be accessible to all, for the common good.”* And, *“knowledge should not be only for those who can pay for it, access to knowledge if everyone's right.”*

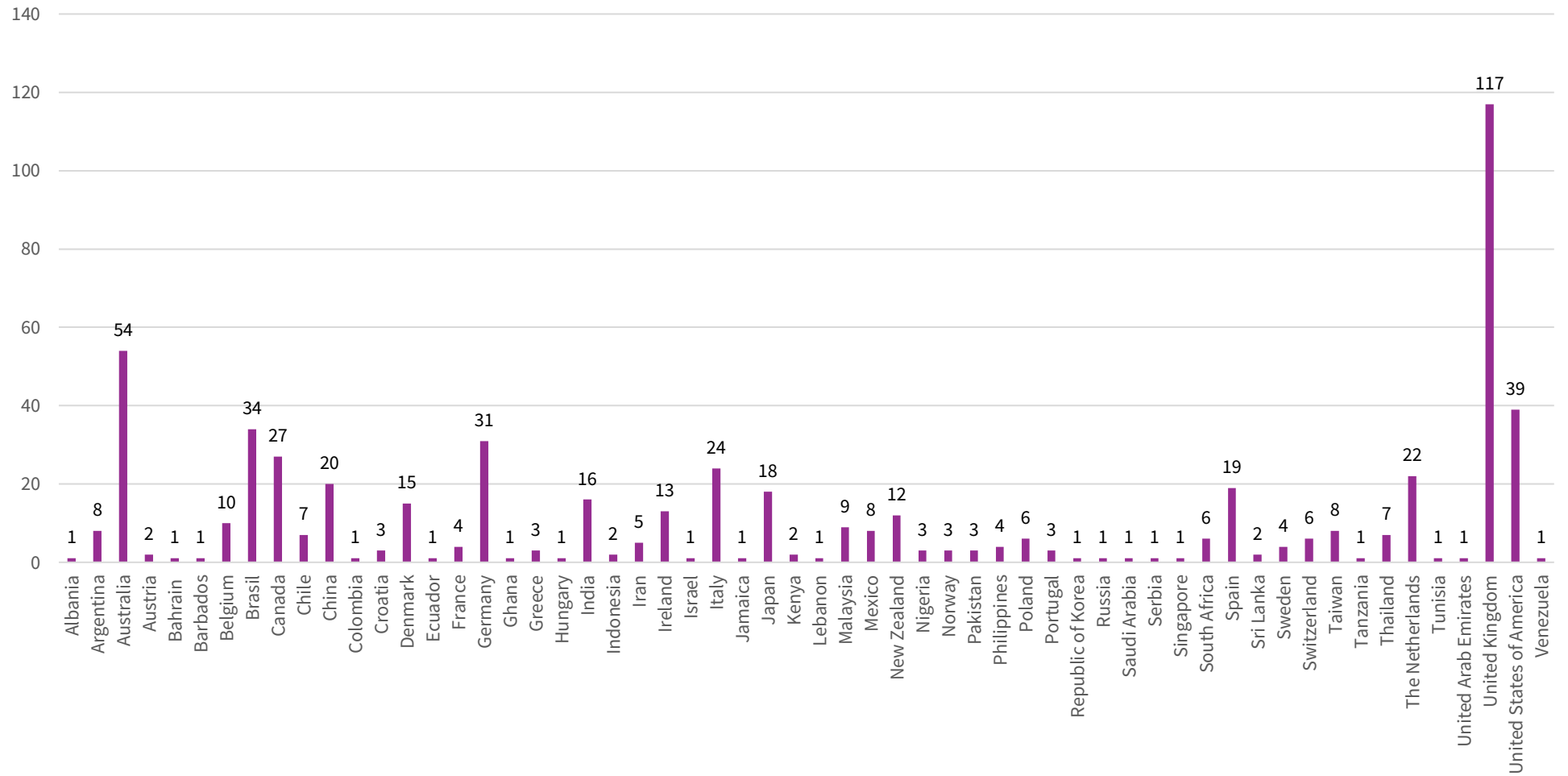
## 9 Has your review contributed or led to further research, policy-making or decision-making?



## About the respondents

# 10 What country do you live in?

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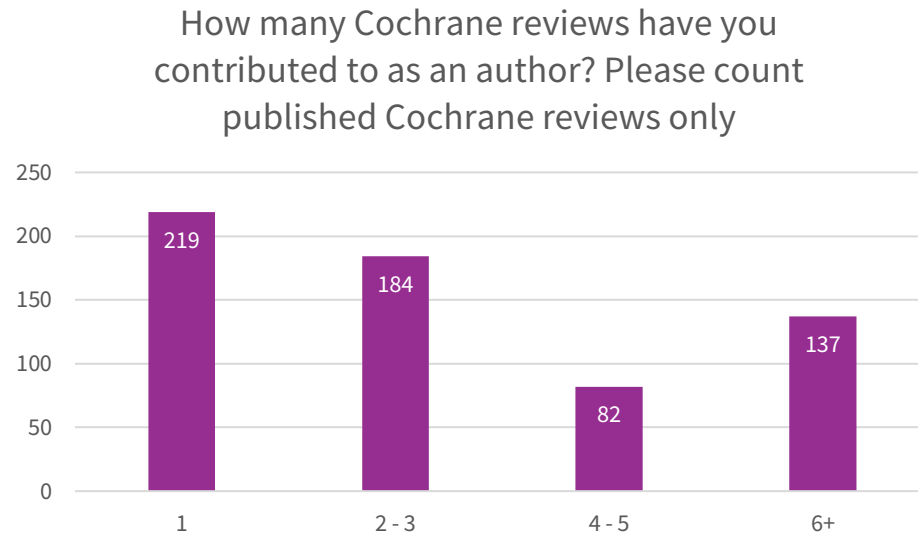


# 11 What is your primary language?

Afrikaans	4	Persian	6
Albanian	1	Polish	8
Arabic	2	Portuguese	39
Bengali	1	Pushto	1
Burmese	1	Russian	2
Cantonese	1	Serbian	1
Catalan	2	Sinhala	2
Chinese	23	Spanish	51
Croatian	2	Swedish	4
Danish	16	Tamil	1
Dutch	30	Thai	7
English	279	Turkish	1
French	6	Urdu	1
German	37		
Greek	4		
Hebrew	1		
Hindi	7		
Hungarian	1		
Indonesia	2		
Italian	28		
Japanese	17		
Korean	3		
Malayalam	2		
Mandarin	7		
Marathi	1		
Norwegian	1		



## 12 How many Cochrane reviews have you contributed to as an author?



## 13 What type(s) of reviews have you written for Cochrane? Select all that apply

Intervention Review (standard)	530
Intervention Review (network meta-analysis)	91
Intervention Review (mixed methods)	23
Diagnostic Test Accuracy review	59
Overview of reviews	40
Individual Participant Data review	9
Prognosis Review	13
Qualitative Review	17
Methodology Review	22
Living Systematic Review	23
Rapid Review	26

## 14 Please select your work status or primary place of work

Student	19
University or College	274
Corporation	4
Hospital / Healthcare	180
Government Organization	19
Non-Profit	11
Research Institution	70
Society or Association	1
Self-employed	12
Retired	14
Unemployed	0
Other	13

## 15 How many years of experience do you have in your field of expertise?

